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"GO! LEAVE ME, AND DO NOT INTRUDE ON ME AGAIN!"

IN HIS POWER;

Or, THE SHADOW OF A CRIME.

BY MRS. M. L. FORDHAM.

CHAPTER I.

A BIRD OF PREY.

MRS. SMITH, or, as she generally preferred

to be called, Mrs. Valentine Smith, sat in her beautifully-furnished drawing-room near the Park one afternoon, thinking.

She had refused to go out to a musical *soiree* with her cousin, Miss Penelope West, that day, because she felt, as she said, "worn to a shadow," by all the gayeties of the last five weeks of the New York season, and preferred a quiet afternoon with her books, her letters and her pet dog in her luxurious apart-

ment to listening to the most astonishing trilles and roulades of Madame Stahl, or the most impassioned ballads of Signor Veroni, in Mrs. Vernon's crowded drawing-rooms on Fifth avenue.

She was a pretty woman—a very pretty woman, most people thought—of about six-and-twenty years of age; and, young as she was, she had been a widow for more than a year. Tall, lithe, and graceful, with a high-bred, yet peculiarly winning manner, no one could meet her without falling a victim to her charms, which were, perhaps, magnified by a certain sadness, or even gloom in her beautiful eyes, suggesting a secret sorrow or unrest, strangely at variance with her present surroundings.

She had been four months or more in her elegant home at the time our story begins. She had come to the city furnished with one or two tolerable introductions and had quite taken society by storm. She was so unlike the usual run of women, and although it was whispered that her late husband had made his money at pork-packing in his early days, and that his death had released her from an anything but pleasant conjugal yoke, yet her character was spotless, her manners *distinguée*, her beauty undeniable, and her wealth enormous.

"I shall have people calling, and miss my afternoon alone," she said, to herself, looking at a little jeweled watch she took from her pocket. "Thomas—Thomas—ah, I declare I am too late! Here is somebody, and they have been let in! Am I a fright, I wonder, or decently presentable?"

She turned to the mirror as she spoke, and took a hasty survey of herself; arranged the tangles of bright brown hair, dressed in the latest fashion, on her shapely head; gave a twitch to her lace collar, and settled the folds and flounces of her dress with deft fingers, on which blazed a wealth of costly rings; and then, as the door opened, felt she was ready to encounter any visitor who might arrive, yet she was hardly prepared for the one who was announced, and gave a slight start and compressed her mouth a little as Thomas said:

"Mr. Jorrison, ma'am."

Mrs. Smith drew back as the new-comer approached her, and her face grew stern and set.

The visitor, a middle-sized, stout, broad-shouldered man, with small, cunning eyes, a short, ragged beard, and hard, cruel mouth, perceived her trouble.

"Well, Mrs. Smith," he said, with an unmistakable twang, "guess you didn't look to see me turn up in these parts?"

"The—the pleasure is an unexpected one, certainly," replied Mrs. Smith, coldly.

"And to think I should have been a month in New York and not found you out!" he went on, seating himself in a chair not far from her. "But there are so many Smiths in New York, it was only by chance I found you. I thought it was you and young miss, your cousin, I saw driving away, all plumes and diamonds, from the swell wedding at St. James's church t'other day; and next day I looks in the paper and, sure enough, I see: 'Mrs. Valentine Smith, ruby velvet and duchess lace,' and 'Miss Penelope West, cream-colored brocade with pearl ornaments,' so I say to myself: 'That's her,' and I found you out, and here I am."

Mrs. Valentine Smith bowed her head gracefully, but her lips never relaxed into a smile.

"Well, you're comfortable here, I guess, and quite a grandee," he went on, looking round the room. "Do you stay here long?"

"A few weeks more," she replied, coldly.

"And then where do you go—home to Omaha?" he asked, eagerly.

"To Omaha? No; certainly not!" she answered. "I have no intention of going far from New York at present."

"Ah, find it too pleasant here—hang it! When I look back ten years and think of Elsie Seagur and look up and see *you* sitting there—why, my head swims!"

"Don't look back, then," she answered with a touch of sarcasm in her voice; "it is quite unnecessary, and very disagreeable. I never do."

"What! Never?" he said, looking into her face with his cunning gray eyes.

"No. Why should I? You know, Silas Jorrison, that there is little in my past I could look back on with pleasure; the last year has been the happiest in my life since the days I was a girl on my father's farm in Nebraska."

"Ay, when you played fast and loose with Tim Blake, and did your best to break my heart!" he retorted, with sudden anger in his voice.

She rose, indignation in her violet eyes.

"Mr. Jorrison, you forget yourself strangely," she said. "I do not know why you have tracked me here; I do not know why you insist on talking of the past—a past which, as you say yourself, you know was full of sorrow to me."

"Ay, and to me!" he muttered.

"It was a want of taste on your part," she went on, "to seek me out; but if we must meet, for Heaven's sake let it be as mere strangers, and let us, above all, let the past rest."

Jorrison looked at her with a sort of ill-

concealed triumph in his eyes; he had made her show she felt his words; he imagined his influence over her to be greater than it really was.

"You are wrong, Elsie Smith," he said, quietly. "You and I can never be mere strangers or mere acquaintances. It's because I wanted to speak to you about the past, and because I, at any rate," (and his voice grew strangely soft and tender) "cannot forget it; that I came here. You left Omaha very suddenly, Elsie."

"I did, Silas Jorrison," she answered, her eyes flashing; "but, at any rate, do not remind me of that time."

"I would have given a deal to have seen you before you left, but I was away West, and you were off before I could hear of your intention to go."

"And who told you of my intention?" she panted.

"Ah," (his little eyes twinkling knowingly) "that's my secret, Mrs. Valentine Smith. But never mind; say you are glad to see me, Elsie: say you haven't quite given up your friends as well as your home. By Jove! this is finer than No. 5, Third Avenue, though!" And he looked round the room. "Bill was a richer fellow than even I thought—beg pardon, Mr. Valentine Smith, I should have said."

"Mr. Smith's name was Valentine—his second name—and he left me everything," replied Mrs. Smith, her lips turning a little white, and pronouncing her late husband's name with a sort of reluctance.

"Who doubts it?" replied the other, looking significantly round. "But I didn't come here to see your riches, or to talk about them. I came to see you."

"Well, and you have seen me, Silas Jorrison," she answered; "and, considering that you were always my husband's enemy, and—and—"

"I was never *your* enemy, Elsie!" he returned, quickly. "Years ago I loved you, and asked you to be my wife. You kept me dangling on and off, but I would have endured any torture to win you, and I bore with you. Ah, you may sneer" (as a smile of contempt passed over Mrs. Valentine's face); "I say I bore with you, and then came my ill-luck. I went to Montana, and when I came back, behold, my pretty Elsie—for I considered you mine—was the wife of old Bill Smith, the pork-packer. A rich old buffer, I am aware, but— Ah, now I know what you're going to say—your friends made you do it—but that won't satisfy me."

"Excuse me," replied Mrs. Smith, rising and taking a step toward the bell; "I was only about to tell my servant to show you to

the door. Who are you, that you should come to my house to insult me, and—"

Quick as lightning, he stepped between her and the bell.

"I will tell you who I am, Elsie Smith!" he answered, a look of iron determination coming into his face. "I am your friend, your lover, your husband, or your most bitter and implacable enemy! Choose!"

She started back, and a look of utter astonishment filled her beautiful eyes, then she burst into a musical laugh.

"What! do you imagine I can for a moment believe you have not forgotten that folly!—for I can call our early boy-and-girl flirtation nothing else. That you—you, Silas Jorrison—think to make me believe you love me, or—"

"Yes; I, Silas Jorrison," he replied, with a touch of pride, "love you; and again I implore you, with as great fervor as I implored you once, twelve years ago, to become my wife."

A look of intense scorn curled Mrs. Valentine Smith's beautiful lip, as she looked first at the shabby, vulgar man before her, and then glanced at her own face and figure reflected in a neighboring mirror, and at her surroundings.

Silas Jorrison saw the look, and interpreting it correctly, stamped his foot, with an execration. She did not heed it.

"After all, I am not so very much surprised at your request, Mr. Jorrison," she said. "I am, I believe, considered a prize in the matrimonial market; but I think if I am knocked down to any bidder—which I doubt—it will be to some one who has something, at any rate, to offer me in exchange for what I shall bring him."

"It's not for your money I want you. I've money enough! If you'd married me, you'd have been as rich as you are now," he replied, bitterly.

"It's all the same," she rejoined, in the same voice. "Under no circumstances, Silas Jorrison, would I ever become your wife!"

"Why?" he asked.

"First, because I do not, and never did, love you."

"That's false!" he interrupted, coarsely.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"It's the truth; but"—and her face grew dark—"that is not the only reason. You are a scheming, revengeful, spiteful man, Silas Jorrison! Go! leave me, and do not intrude on me again!"

She rose with flashing eyes as she spoke, and pointed to the door.

Jorrison threw himself into a chair, with a short laugh.

"I'm spiteful, revengeful, and scheming, am I?" he said. "Do you know what folk called you when you married Bill Smith?" he said.

"I don't know, neither do I care," she answered.

"Oh, maybe; but"—and he lowered his voice—"do you know what they called you when he was found dead—shot—eh?"

"It is worthy of you to recall that last insult and calumny to my mind," she replied, firmly, but turning very white.

"Oh, I'm reckoned spiteful, you know!" he retorted. "Well, do you know what folks said on that head, Mrs. Valentine Smith?"

"Yes; lies! I didn't heed them," she answered.

"Lies, perhaps—I'm spiteful, you know, Elsie—but what would one of your proud snobbish suitors say if he were told—"

"Hush, hush!" she cried, moved at last. "You know—none better—that what they said was a lie!"

"Bill Smith wasn't a particular good card," he went on, "folks said—but maybe that's lies, too; that he wasn't so kind a husband as might be; that he was jealous, and cruel, and shut up his pretty Elsie, and beat her sometimes; and she didn't take it as meekly as might be; and he was rich, mortal rich; and he was found shot in his own grounds, too, and that after a quarrel with his pretty wife, she being the last person in whose company he was seen alive!"

"And you dare tell me you believe I—I—"

"If I believed any harm of you, Mrs. Valentine Smith, I wouldn't have asked you to become Mrs. Jorrison as I did five minutes ago," he replied. "I only said what folks believed. Now let's cut all this short, Elsie. Again I say, promise to become my wife, and remember if you refuse—"

"Which I do, most emphatically!" she said.

"Remember," he went on, without noticing her interruption, "that I am a revengeful man!"

"And what can you do to harm me?" she said, proudly, but trembling from head to foot.

"Spiteful, revengeful people can do a mighty lot of harm if they choose!" he replied; "but don't provoke me, Elsie; it would go against the grain with me anyhow to hurt you. Be sensible, and say at least you'll think of me?"

He came a step or two toward her, and held out his hand.

"Never, never!" she cried, shrinking from him. "I do not love you—you are hateful, loathsome to me! Go away, Silas Jorrison, I tell you; you are abhorrent to me! I—"

"That will do; you needn't put yourself out to abuse me any more, Elsie; it ain't ladylike, and you hurt my feelings!" interrupted Jorrison, in a cold, hard tone. "But remember this; I've offered you all, the best a man can offer a woman, twice now, and you've played with my feelings and insulted me in return. You said just now I was a revengeful man; take care for the future, Elsie! When you think yourself most secure and happiest, then dread my revenge, for you shall feel it with its full force!"

So saying, Silas Jorrison walked quickly out of the room, and Elsie, falling back on the sofa, burst into tears.

Jorrison's visit had more than spoiled her quiet afternoon at home.

CHAPTER II.

THE GREATEST FLIRT.

MEANWHILE Mrs. Vernon's musical afternoon was attracting a crowd of fashionables to her house in Fifth avenue, among whom were Miss Penelope West and her chaperon for the time being, Mrs. Parke Carter, a leader in social circles.

As Penelope walked up the stairs slowly behind Mrs. Carter, a stout, florid dame, who found the ascent somewhat difficult, and followed her into the music-room, many pairs of eyes were turned on her.

"Who is she—that curious-looking girl with the big gray-green eyes and dark hair? Pretty, do you call her? Odd-looking, I should say. Oh, graceful, very; but do you admire that *very* dead white complexion? Quite an artist's beauty. Ah! her smile is charming. Well, yes, she is wonderfully attractive, I grant; but *who* is she?"

"Nobody. Only a Western girl—rich, of course. Came with Mrs. Carter. You've heard of Mrs. Valentine Smith, perhaps, Mrs. Poindexter?" replied the young dandy to whom these observations had been addressed.

"Well, that girl is Miss Penelope West, her cousin—plays divinely, and dances like an angel; but she's the most audacious little flirt in all New York!"

"Ha, ha! threw you over for Jerry St. Ives at the regiment ball—eh, Courtland?" said another, at which the youth looked foolish. "Depend on it, Miss Penelope West is one of the cleverest girls in the city, if you like!"

"An adventuress, like all those people of whose antecedents no one knows anything, I'll warrant," remarked a sour-faced matron. Do you know her, Mrs. Poindexter?"

"I—oh, yes—charming woman; odd I haven't noticed the cousin before; but they'll be at my 'at home' on the 12th, I dare say," replied the other. "That sort of people are out of the general run, and it's quite re-

freshing to meet somebody new; one gets awfully tired of one another in town before the season's over. There! I've caught Miss Penelope's side-face, and must allow it's exquisite; don't you think so, Mr. Courtland?"

"I quite agree with you, madame, but it's a pity that she—"

"That she is a flirt, and threw you over! Fie! you mustn't bear malice! Hush! Tresca's going to sing, and neither she nor Mrs. Vernon will ever forgive us if we talk while she is warbling to us."

Tresca, the reigning favorite of the day, treated the company to a long *scena* from the last new opera, during which a hush so deep fell on the chattering audience that you might have heard a pin fall; then, at its conclusion, after a certain amount of hand-clapping and bravoes, there went up a sort of satisfied rustling from the seated crowd, and tongues began again to wag freely.

There was an empty chair beside Penelope West, and a tall, good-looking young man, who had been an unwilling listener to the chatter of Mrs. Poindexter, and Mr. Courtland (whom he would have liked to destroy on the spot), moved slowly toward it, and just succeeded in securing it before it was pounced upon by another and somewhat older man, who had to content himself with bowing to Miss West, and receiving a sweet smile from her in return, over the bonnets of half a dozen intervening young ladies, while his more fortunate rival seated himself beside her.

"How dreadfully grave you look, Mr. Gower!" said Penelope, after the first greetings. "Don't you care for music? Are you bored? Has any one offended you, or has something or somebody hit against your favorite angle?"

"Nothing is wrong with me, Miss West; and in your company how could I be bored?" he replied, gallantly; but in his heart of hearts he felt anything but happy, and Mr. Courtland's words, "She is the greatest flirt in New York," still rung in his ears.

"Very well; I never force confidences, and I am glad to learn I'm mistaken," she replied, raising her gray eyes to his face for a moment. "Have you been here long?"

"I came in just as you did. Are you going to Mrs. Poindexter's on the 12th?" he replied.

"I can hardly tell you. I don't seem to know till Elsie tells me each morning what are our engagements for the day or evening. Elsie likes Mrs. Poindexter, though, so perhaps we may look in," she answered; "and every one will be there one knows."

"Except me! I haven't the honor of the lady's acquaintance," he replied, with a mixture of stiffness and regret.

"Oh, then, Elsie shall get you a card. I'll manage it for you—that is, if you care to go?" she said, quickly.

"Of course I do. If you are to be there," he said, "I shall care to go."

She laughed sweetly.

"I am a very poor attraction," she said, and she looked at him shyly.

Was she making a fool of him? he wondered, and replied with a forced gallantry:

"Miss Penelope West is quite one of the attractions of town! New York rings with her praises!"

"Indeed! Thank you, Mr. Gower. We Westerners ought to be very grateful to you big folk in New York for taking so much notice of us, I am sure," she replied, very dryly.

"I don't see why. We couldn't help it if we would," he answered. "But where is Mrs. Valentine Smith to-day?"

"Tired, strange to say, of being viewed by the giddy multitude, and praised or criticised by the *elite*. Elsie resolved to give herself a holiday and stay quietly at home alone this afternoon! She has been very hard worked of late, poor dear," returned Penelope, opening and shutting the little ivory fan she held in her hand. "You see, I am insatiable; I prefer gayety and dissipation to staying at home, however tired I may be; and I'm going out to dinner, and then to the opera with Mrs. Carter to-night; and as soon as we have got through this programme, and paid one or two visits and called—"

"Oh, don't!—don't—you quite bewilder me, my dear Miss West," cried Gower, laughing. "You know I am not quite so much in the current as you are, and I declare you make me feel giddy. How can health or head stand it?"

"Well, you see, my health is perfect," she retorted, gravely. "And as to my head, if you mean my mind, why I'm afraid there's not enough of it to be really spoiled; the atmosphere of the giddy throng suits my frivolous disposition. Oh, dear! how awful—how truly awful it would be to be condemned to a country life, to solitude and poverty, as some are! Now, Elsie is quite different; she wouldn't mind it—the solitude, at least for six months of the year. Oh, Mr. Sutherland! how do you do? How glad I am to see you! but I did not know you were a frequenter of musical parties." And she turned eagerly to a fine-looking man, with clear-cut, handsome features, and dark, keen eyes that looked straight into hers as she spoke, and held out a tiny gloved hand to him, quite forgetting,

as it seemed, Mr. Laurence Gower—indeed, almost turning her back on him, as the newcomer dropped into the chair Mrs. Carter had just vacated, and she entered into conversation with him.

"Where is your cousin, Mrs. Valentine Smith?" he asked, looking round. "I don't see her. But you are not alone, of course?"

"Oh, dear, no!—nothing so unheard of. I'm under Mrs. Carter's care, and she has just gone to speak to an old friend. I'm very sorry for you, Mr. Sutherland, but Elsie isn't here. She was tired, and stayed at home; and—and, like me, I don't fancy she thought she would find you here. I have found more friends here, though, than I expected; haven't I, Mr. Gower?" And she turned, with a bewitching smile, to Laurence Gower, who was sitting devoured with wrath beside her, Will Courtland's words sounding in his ears.

He could not resist the smile, however, and returned it, and was presently introduced to Mr. Ivor Sutherland, and asked to a small "at home" at Mrs. Valentine Smith's next evening, "where we only admit friends—real friends, you know," as Penelope whispered to him, and thus raised him to the seventh heaven of happiness, so that he forgot to hate Mr. Sutherland when Penelope took his arm, and, the music being over, went into the refreshment-room to solace herself with ices and wafers.

Mr. Laurence Gower was a young gentleman of excellent fortune and family, who had read a great deal and traveled much. He was well received in the best society circles, but although he was fond of society, he never allowed it to engross all his time and thoughts, but gave a good deal still to reading and the cultivation of art, which formed one of the greatest of what he termed the real pleasures of his existence. When he had arrived in New York from Italy, three months before, nothing was further from his thoughts than marriage; he raved, as most young men do, about beauty and love, vowed that there were no eyes like the dark eyes of the sunny Italy, no complexions like the clear olive, with a rosy tint beneath it, such as is to be met with in the land of the vine and orange-grove; yet ere he had been a month in New York, a pair of strange, dreamy, yet piquant gray orbs, a complexion pale as alabaster, had put all their beauties into the shade, and Laurence Gower was fain to confess that in all his travels no beauty like the beauty of Penelope West had met his eye; that his heart was no longer his own, and that to marry her he would gladly give all he held most dear and prized most highly in the world.

He knew that his friends would wonder at

him, and his family object; he knew that his uncle and guardian, Henry Gower, had set his heart on his marrying a certain young heiress whom he had picked out as a suitable match for his nephew, and that he, Laurence, had pleaded that he was not a marrying man, as an excuse for not following his uncle's wishes, and that he should disgrace himself by falling in love with a pretty face—a stranger, with not even a fortune to recommend her to his family, was the thing of all in the world he least expected to do.

"I can afford to pass over all their ill-nature and spite," he thought, "even Anna's; but shall I ever win her love?—that is the question. I've thought at times that she seemed to care a little for me; yet see, even now she has gone off with Sutherland, when she might just as well have gone into the refreshment-room with me. I never asked her though, fool that I was, and Sutherland is a friend of Mrs. Valentine's, I know. How on earth can any one say Mrs. Valentine is prettier than Penelope? It's absurd; but she's pretty, too, in her own way, and very nice. Well, I'll be going."

And forthwith Laurence Gower left the house, and proceeded to his room to pass a quiet evening, thinking of the lovely Penelope West, and wondering why Will Courtland had called her the "greatest flirt in New York."

Mr. Ivor Sutherland, after being introduced to Mrs. Carter, saw her and Miss West into their carriage, and then walked away toward the Park.

"I think, if you'll drop me at home, dear Mrs. Carter, and not mind the trouble of calling for me, in an hour's time, when you have done your visits, I should just like to run in and see Elsie. She had a headache when I left her," said Penelope, as they drove off.

"By all means, my dear! I sha'n't be more than an hour; but if Mrs. Valentine Smith wants you, I could call for you later on," replied good-natured Mrs. Carter.

"A thousand thanks! How kind you are! But I shall be quite ready when you come," replied Penelope.

"Elsie! Elsie!" she cried, running up-stairs after Mrs. Carter had dropped her at her cousin's house in Madison avenue, "Thomas, where is Mrs. Smith? Louise, where is your mistress?"

"Madame is in her boudoir. She has a terrible headache and looks wretchedly ill," replied the maid. "But, ah! who can feel well in this vile climate? Madame should go abroad or travel."

"Elsie, are you really ill? What is the matter?" cried Penelope, softly, bending over

the recumbent form of Mrs. Valentine Smith, who lay on the sofa, her face half-buried in the cushion.

"Nothing! An awful neuralgic headache, dear. Have you enjoyed your party, Pen?" she answered, in a stifled voice."

"Elsie, you are really ill. I'll send for the doctor," cried Penelope, but Mrs. Smith laid her hand on her arm and bade her wait.

"How white and wretched you look, dear," continued the girl; "and you've been crying—I know you've been crying. Has anything—any one annoyed you, darling?"

"Nothing's wrong, dear," she answered, putting back the hair from her flushed face. "I am a little annoyed, but I won't talk of it just now."

"Not with me?" asked Penelope, anxiously.

"Not with you? Of course not; and it's really nothing. I'm a fool to think of it. Who did you see at Mrs. Vernon's? Make me a cup of tea, darling, and tell me the news!"

"Oh, I saw heaps of people, and I talked to Mr. Gower and your friend, Mr. Ivor Sutherland. What a fine countenance he has, Elsie! He was disappointed that you were not there, I saw."

For a moment a pleased smile flitted across Elsie's white lips, and then it faded away.

"Yes," she said, "Mr. Sutherland is a very good fellow—a very nice man."

"So is Mr. Gower, Elsie; only I do tease him so, I make him quite cross; but there is far more in him than in most young men of fashion. Don't you think so, Elsie?"

But Mrs. Smith had not been listening to Penelope's remarks; her thoughts had gone back to Silas Jorrison and his sayings. What would Mr. Ivor Sutherland think of her could he know what certain folk in Omaha had said of her when her husband had been found dead?

That night Penelope West, from her seat at the opera in Mrs. Carter's box, saw before her a figure that caused a cold shudder to pass through her. There in the dress-circle, sat Silas Jorrison. She no longer wondered what had upset her cousin that afternoon; of course, Silas Jorrison had been to the house in Madison avenue.

CHAPTER III.

A COWARDLY THREAT.

"Poor Elsie! I wager that horrid Jorrison has been calling on her, and reminding her of all the miseries in her past life I try so hard to make her forget," said Penelope, as she ran lightly up-stairs after being set down at her own door by Mrs. Carter. "That

accounts for her headache and paleness. I wonder what he talked about? I can guess some."

But Penelope was far, very far, from guessing all or half what had passed between her cousin and Silas Jorrison.

"What! gone to bed already, and does not wish to be disturbed?" she said in dismay, as Elsie's maid gave her the message her cousin left for her. "Hum! Well, I'm half-sorry I refused that dance at the Leisters'; it's not much past twelve now, and I'm not a bit tired. I can't think what's come over Elsie; I hope she is not going to be really ill. Well, I suppose I must go to bed too—there's nothing to sit up for."

So the young lady walked slowly up to her own apartment, and in half an hour's time was in bed and asleep, slumbering as quietly and peacefully as if she had been playing in the fields or rambling over mountains or through country lanes all day; and as if neither Elsie, Jorrison, or even Laurence Gower, existed.

It was rather late when the two ladies met at breakfast next day. Elsie was down first, and began the perusal of a pile of letters, notes, cards of invitation, and such-like, that lay beside her plate. One after another she threw them aside, till over one written in an ugly, scrimped hand, she paused, and when Penelope entered, hid it under a heap of others.

But Penelope was too quick for her, and saw the action. "From Jorrison," she thought, but said not a word.

"Did you enjoy the opera, dear?" said Elsie, turning with rather a flushed look to her cousin. "I am so sorry I was not up when you came in, but my head was so bad I was obliged to go to bed. I knew it was my only chance of being better to-day."

"And you are better?" asked Penelope. "You look a little flushed, I think. What a heap of notes and letters!—and I have only four. I feel ill-treated!"

"You needn't envy me my letters, dear," she answered, with a sigh, regretting the words as soon as they were spoken.

"No?—what's the matter? They seem mostly invitations. Is your milliner dunning you, Elsie; or have you been too lavish of purchases at your jeweler's or at Sypher's?" said Penelope with a laugh.

"No; it's not money; I don't spend half I might, child. It's nothing—only something—a trifle that vexed me. Tell me all about last night, and whom you saw at the opera."

"Oh, all the world was there, of course, to hear the new tenor; and really he is wonderful, Elsie; but I saw some one, an old acquaintance of ours at home— Oh, how white

you have grown, poor dear!—I saw Silas Jorrison."

"The wretch!" cried Mrs. Valentine Smith: "did he see you, Pen?"

"No, I think not. But I tell you what, Elsie; I feel certain he is the cause of all this headache and these pale cheeks of yours, my dear, and I hope you have told Thomas and the other servants not to admit him again."

"It is not necessary. Yes, I did see him yesterday, Pen; and he is going away back to Omaha, and leaves the city to-morrow," she answered.

"Did he tell you so yesterday?" asked Penelope.

"No; the truth is, he upset me dreadfully yesterday, Pen and I've got a—a letter from him—where is it?—I can't find it—which has annoyed me still more!" she replied.

"There it is!" said Penelope. "Look under those letters, Elsie!"

And she pointed to the heap of half-read letters on the table.

"Ah, yes! here it is!" said Elsie, beginning to put it into her pocket.

"Mayn't I see it, Elsie?" asked Penelope.

"Well, there's no news—nothing you would care to see. You know what sort of a man he always was."

"Elsie, Elsie!" cried Penelope, eagerly; "you are deceiving me—you are keeping something from me! Cannot you trust me? When have I ever failed you? Show me that letter!"

"Pen, I am not deceiving you; but, oh! there is a horrible innuendo in that letter—almost more than an innuendo—that I cannot permit even you to see," replied Elsie, in a piteous voice.

"Trust me, Elsie," replied Penelope, holding out her hand. "Give me the letter."

She read it through, with flashing eyes and white lips.

"The wretch!—the cowardly villain!—to revive such a monstrous falsehood. Elsie, my darling, it is no new tale to me; but do not be so afflicted by this man's spitefulness. He cannot harm you!"

"Perhaps not; but he may poison my happiness, and make my life wretched, Pen," sobbed Elsie.

"I don't believe it. All he says is cowardly braggadocio. He makes believe that you are in his power for his own ends; he wants to frighten you into becoming his wife. Defy him, Elsie! treat him with the contempt he deserves; forget his wicked lying words, and be happy."

Penelope flung her arms around her cousin, and tried by every soothing word and caress she could think of to quiet her grief. She treated Mr. Jorrison's threats with even

more contempt and disdain, and counseled her cousin to dismiss them from her thoughts, as being more utterly futile than she felt them to be herself.

Elsie must not allow her happiness to be destroyed and her peace of mind disturbed by a wretch like Silas Jorrison, she thought.

"But if my miserable story should get whispered abroad," said Elsie, "as it will if—if—"

"Your miserable story? Yes, it is a miserable story, Elsie!" replied Penelope; "but surely there is nothing in it you are ashamed of? What wrong there was was not on your side. You were not a happy wife; your daily life was made miserable; your husband died suddenly a violent death. But were you to blame for all this?"

"But do you not see—"

"Answer me, dear; were you to blame for anything that happened?" persisted Penelope.

"No, Pen, no! You know that well, but—"

"Then, be brave, and don't take the hints of this bad man, as he no doubt hopes you will. Don't let them prey on you, and make you wretched. You see now what a wretch he is. Perhaps it was he himself who set about the lying report he now wishes you to believe was once current about—about your husband's death!" replied Penelope.

"You are right there, Pen, perhaps. I believe he sent me that—that dreadful newspaper in which it was mentioned; but what should I do if it were to be revived, and whispered about here in New York, Pen? Who would know us or speak to us then? We should be looked on as outcasts—as far, far worse than the most outrageous of adventuresses!" said Elsie.

For an instant, as she spoke, Penelope thought of Mr. Gower and Ivor Sutherland, and felt that at any rate there were one or two among their new acquaintances who would not desert them even if such a rumor as Elsie dreaded should get about.

"I don't believe everybody would give us up even then," she replied, thoughtfully. "I am sure Mr. Gower and Mr.—"

"Ah! Mr. Gower loves you, Pen, I believe; but men are so queer, he might think—But why do I speak like this? It is I the rumors would injure, not you, darling; thank Heaven for that! But I believe any man would think twice before asking a woman with—over whom such a cloud had once hung, and might again gather—mark that, Pen—to—to be his wife. As to some men, they would think it a valid excuse for breaking off an engagement, or throwing an unfortunate woman who loved them, over.

However, it is no question of love or marriage with me, that is one thing. I shall never marry again, Pen," she replied; and there was a sad ring in her voice as she uttered the last words.

Penelope looked at her sharply, and then smiled.

"Never?" she said.

"Never!" replied Elsie; "this horrid letter has decided me."

"This letter? Then you were not quite decided before, Elsie?" she retorted, with a laugh, while Elsie blushed and protested, and vowed it was a shame of her cousin to make fun of her and her trouble.

"I don't make fun of you, dear, as you know; but you make a great deal too much of this mean letter! Here, let me burn it, and think no more about it. Do you know who is coming here to-night to our *particular* 'at home'?"

"Oh, dear! I had forgotten our 'at home.' Can't we put it off, Pen?" she sighed.

"What! when Laurence Gower and Mr. Sutherland have both faithfully promised to come? Ah, ha! my pretty Elsie, you are not so anxious to put it off as you were a minute ago," she laughed. "Now, don't look sad again, or I shall have to scold you."

There was little trace of sadness or trouble on Mrs. Valentine Smith's pretty face that evening, as, dressed to perfection, she sat in her drawing-room among her guests, her beautiful violet eyes and rosy lips smiling a welcome to each one who entered; while Penelope aided her in entertaining her friends, and indeed, for some, was the attraction that brought them, even more than the charms of their pretty hostess, to her reception.

As the evening wore on, Elsie's eyes wandered more and more frequently to the door, and a shade of disappointment might have been discerned in them as, one time after another, it opened, without admitting the friend she evidently expected.

At length it opened again, and Mr. Sutherland was announced, and she rose with evident pleasure to meet him; then, as he took her hand, a change came over her, and she seemed hardly able to answer his greeting.

Penelope's quick eyes caught what was passing, and she quickly left the group of guests by whom she was surrounded, and came up to where her cousin and Mr. Sutherland were standing.

"Courage, Elsie! don't ruin your happiness a second time for a vain fear," she whispered; and then, with a smile and a nod to a new-comer, hurried across the room to the piano, and seating herself at it, began to play a brilliant piece.

Elsie had blushed deeply at her cousin's words, but they had given her pride an impetus, and in another moment she was talking with her usual easy grace and gayety to Mr. Sutherland, who seemed too much wrapped up in the pleasure of being in her society to have eyes or ears for any one else.

"You will sing for us to-night, Mrs. Smith?" he said, after Penelope had played another piece, and amid great applause had left the piano.

"Not to-night, I think," she replied. "You know I seldom sing to many people—a number, even of friends, frightens me."

"But sing for me," he said, in a low tone. "Do not mind the others. Won't you?"

She hesitated. There was no mistaking the meaning of his low, pleading voice. If she did what he asked, it was giving direct encouragement to the love she could no longer doubt he felt for her; if she did not, it would certainly be taken as a rebuff.

Only a moment she hesitated, and looking up in his face, saw the pain her hesitation gave him; then she rose, and without a word went to the piano.

She had a beautiful voice, and had since her arrival in New York, taken some pains in cultivating it, and never perhaps had she sung with such power and intensity of expression as she did that night. Her audience was entranced, and more than one eye was dim when she ended; and as she rose, a burst of applause greeted her. She did not heed it, however, but looked timidly almost at Mr. Sutherland for his approval.

To her surprise, there was a pained look in his face; but when his eyes met hers they were very tender.

"Your song was lovely," he said, "and must have touched all hearts. Why did you choose one so sad and pathetic?"

"Oh, I don't know!" she replied, with a light laugh. "I think I prefer sad songs to lively ones, Mr. Sutherland. But, dear me, I fear I have made you quite gloomy. I will sing something livelier, or, better still, make Pen sing one of her little French ballads."

And she glided off to find her cousin.

Mr. Sutherland turned away with a sigh.

"She is not happy. No woman who was happy could have sung like that. There was suffering in every word—every note. Strange, in all my intercourse with her up to the present I never divined there was any trouble either in her past or present. My poor, beautiful darling, shall I ever have the right to ask her about her past, and to comfort—to make her forget any trouble she may have had to endure or endures now?"

And then, while Elsie was submitting to the praises and compliments of her friends,

Mr. Ivor Sutherland made up his mind that before another month should pass he would ask Elsie to be his wife, and that if she said "No," he would not take "no" for an answer, but try again and again until he should succeed in winning her love and her hand.

"And if that should never be," he murmured, as he drove home half an hour later, "at any rate, I will always be her friend—a friend who would do anything and risk anything for her. But she has suffered herself, and will not be cruel to me, I feel certain. Some day she will be mine."

CHAPTER IV. ON THE BEACH.

CHAFING bitterly at the imperious call from his partners in business that obliged him to return to his native soil so quickly, and with a heart full of malice and baffled love, Silas Jorrison found himself a day or two later, *en route* for Omaha.

He had passed a miserable time that evening Penelope had seen him at the opera. He had recognized her instantly, and had passed the rest of the evening in vainly trying to discover if Elsie were the other occupant of the box. He had seen one or two men come into it and chat in a friendly manner with Miss West, and jealousy filled his heart when he thought that perhaps some rival was even at that moment paying court to his old love.

For his old love—his one and only love—Elsie was, and the sight of her that afternoon in all her beauty and sweetness had stirred the slumbering fire to a flame, awoke old memories, and brought back old dreams, and surprised even Silas himself by the strange power they still exercised on him; and yet he hated her next moment when he thought of her proud words and contemptuous smile, and could have beaten all the beauty out of her lovely face had she been with him and in his power.

"Tim Blake and I—yes; she made rare fools of us!" he muttered. "And when she married old Bill Smith, I thought he would never be his own self again. Lord, how pale and haggard he grew! Never cursed and swore as I did. I never cared for Tim, but he puzzled me then. Not a word would he say against her, and bade me be silent when I miscalled her, unless I wanted my teeth knocked down my throat! And then, in Omaha, when Bill was found dead there, he knew more than most men, I'll be bound, but not a word would he utter—not he. Well, as long as Elsie remains Mrs. Valentine Smith, I'll hold my hand; but let her marry or try to marry any one else, and she'll have cause to remember Silas Jorrison. She's got that pert young woman, Penelope West, with

her, but I'm a match for both. Well, when I get to Omaha, I'll just have a run round, read over those papers I've got, and see how the land lies."

When Silas got there, however, the urgent letters he found waiting for him obliged him to set off at once for Montana, and the mysterious business which he had been intending to see to was never looked after. He took the train northward the day after reaching Omaha, and for many months was lost to the civilized world.

The season was well-nigh over, and it became a question of grave importance to Mrs. Valentine Smith and Miss West where and how their summer should be passed. They had plenty of invitations to stay with friends, but Elsie seemed to think a little real retirement would suit her much better than a round of visits; and taking the advice of her friend, Mr. Sutherland, whom she now consulted, much to Penelope's amusement and delight, on every imaginable subject, she took a pretty cottage for the warm weather on the Long Island coast.

"I hope you will come and cheer our solitude sometimes," she said to him a few days before they left town. "Penelope and I will both want some one to say to us, 'How delightful is solitude,' you know."

"I shall be in that part of the Island very soon," he said, smiling. "You did not think I was going to exile myself from your presence for three long months? No, no; indeed, to tell you the truth, I have some property close to Westham which requires looking after, so that I dare say I may be close to you for some weeks."

"How delightful!" cried Penelope, clapping her hands. "And Mr. Gower has promised to come down, too. That will be a charming solitude *a quatre*, won't it, Elsie?"

"Am I right—am I right?" muttered Elsie, as Mr. Sutherland drove away.

"What are you murmuring in that sentimental way, dear?" asked Pen, with laughing eyes.

"I was saying 'Am I right,' Pen," replied Elsie. "Oh, don't laugh; it is far more serious than you think it, and if—if—"

"If what?" asked Pen.

"If he ever heard a word of that report—if Silas Jorrison were to carry out his threat, I should die, Pen, for I love him, and believe he loves me!"

"If he loves you, as I am sure he does, dear, he will care nothing for what a reptile like Silas may say," replied Pen; "but I did hope, Elsie, you had forgotten all that nonsense. Take the happiness wherewith the gods provide you, dear, and don't worry and torment yourself with the saying and doings of such as Silas Jorrison. Believe me,

with Mr. Sutherland, at any rate, he has no power to harm you."

"You always look on the bright side of things, dear, and try to cheer me, as, indeed, you do; but still, at times I can't help fearing that in some way, by some mysterious means, he may really have it in his power to injure me."

Leigh Cottage, at Westham, turned out to be as cosey a little nook as Mrs. Sutherland had described it, and the beauty of the scenery around far exceeded Elsie's expectations. From the garden a grand view of the sound, was obtained, and behind the house rose a well-wooded slope, through which led grassy paths to the top, from whence a fine panorama of the country and sea round could be obtained.

The cottage was a quaint old building, half-farm, half-villa, and furnished in a queer, old-fashioned style that delighted both the ladies, who, like many of their countrymen and women, rejoiced in anything belonging to bygone times.

"And whose is that large house slanting in the middle of a lawn, and half hidden by trees!" asked Penelope, as, the day after their arrival, she found her way, with the gardener's help, to the top of the slope.

"That is Crest Lawn, miss," he replied; "one of the finest and most expensive places about. It's just two miles from Westham, miss, and belongs to Mr. Sutherland."

"Oh, indeed!" replied Penelope, with such surprise that the gardener looked at her in amazement; for had not Mr. Sutherland himself taken the cottage for the ladies, and stocked the garden with choice flowers from his place?

"Dear me!" continued Pen, noticing the man's look of surprise; "I had no idea Mr. Sutherland's property was so near Leigh Cottage! It must be a beautiful place."

"Ay, that it be, miss, and we be all glad that Mr. Sutherland is coming to stay in it for the next three or four months. Since his mother died, four years ago, he's traveled a deal, and it's little we see of him here. He's a fine young gentleman, miss, is Mr. Sutherland—just one of the right sort; and he's missed in the place when he's absent."

"You see, every one speaks in glowing terms of your hero," whispered Pen to her cousin, as, an hour later, they stood before the house on the lawn, and saw Mr. Sutherland drive in at the gate. "I dare say, if you were to ask the groom there, he would tell you he is the best master he ever had; and on the principle of 'good masters make good servants,' I could quite believe it, for I never saw such a well-kept, well-cleaned turnout."

Ivor Sutherland's dark eyes flashed with delight as he saw the look of welcome and the tell-tale blush, which showed him that Elsie was really glad to see him again.

"You like the cottage, I hope?" he said; and his eyes looked quickly over the flower-beds and borders as he spoke, and then rather anxiously toward the house."

"Oh, it's simply delightful!" cried Penelope. "Neither of us has ever known what it was to live in a real seaside place before."

"It is charming," returned Elsie; "and we are so much obliged to you, Mr. Sutherland, for finding us such a retreat."

"It is a pretty little place. I'm so glad you like it! Miss West, you used to say, in town, that you adored everything old-fashioned. Now, I believe the greater part of this cottage was built by a great-grandfather of mine; that is partly what made me think of Leigh Cottage as an autumn retreat for you."

"Happy thought!" cried Penelope. "Now, as I am housekeeper, I'll order tea, and leave Elsie to show you how we have arranged the house."

The tea was ordered, and duly set on the table, but Penelope waited in vain for the return of Mr. Sutherland and Elsie, and after half an hour's deliberation she sat down and poured herself out a cup of tea.

"It's cold!" she muttered, with a queer smile and a shrug of her shoulders. "I suppose I'd better send for some more; but yet perhaps it won't matter; they are getting quite beyond caring for anything so grossly material as tea and toast. I foresee I shall be very lonely here, unless, or until, Laurence Gower comes down; they won't want me, except when I'm required to act propriety, as English people say. Well, I'll ring for more tea for them, on second considerations."

Scarcely was it on the table, when the truants entered.

"My dear Pen—What! you've had your tea!" cried Elsie, in surprise. "We've had such a lovely walk!"

"Which has made you forget the time," retorted Penelope, playfully, pointing to the clock; "but you'll forgive me, I know."

"Dear me! it is much later than I had any idea of! It was wrong of me to take Mrs. Smith so far!" cried Mr. Sutherland.

"Don't mention it. You see, I did not put myself out for you," replied Pen, her eyes sparkling mischievously. "I took my tea when I felt I could wait for it no longer."

"And now I must be going, Mrs. Smith," Mr. Sutherland said, rising. "Miss West, I am going to drive you and Mrs. Smith over to Crest Lawn to-morrow, if you will come."

"With pleasure!" replied Pen.

And, as he left the room, she laughed quietly.

Intimacies progress far more quickly in the country, as a rule, than in town. In New York, Mr. Sutherland had been wont to see Elsie every day for a short time, either at her own house, or at some party or "at home;" but here, at Westham, he passed hours daily in her company, either alone or with Penelope as the only interrupter of their *tete-a-tete*, and Penelope took care to keep herself as much out of the way as she could. She was more than anxious that Mr. Sutherland should become her cousin's husband.

"He is just the very man for her! She is far too young, and pretty, and soft-hearted to go through life alone; and she has had so very little happiness as yet!" she thought.

And, as time passed on, she felt certain her hopes were likely to be fulfilled.

Mr. Sutherland and Elsie were taking a walk one evening along the shore, when, to the latter's terror and surprise, she raised her eyes, which had been cast downward for some time as she listened to Ivor Sutherland's talk, and found that the tide had risen so rapidly that their exit from the little bay in which they had been pacing to and fro was quite cut off.

"Don't be alarmed," he replied to her startled look; "the tide has nearly reached its highest. We shall be imprisoned here for a little while, it is true; but it is fine weather, and Miss Penelope will not be frightened about you, as she knows you are with me. Let us sit on the rocks here at the head of the bay; the waves will scarcely reach to them."

"I confess it gave me a fright," said Elsie, with a shiver, as she looked at the waves dashing around them, "and, as some one says somewhere, 'I would fain die a dry death.'"

"Do you think I would have brought you where there was danger?" he replied, reproachfully. "No; trust me, I know every turn of the tide, every sign of the weather, every rock, and cove, and cranny in this dear old coast, where I have lived so happily—or did live so happily all the days of my life until—"

And he paused.

"Yes; I know you had a sad loss," said Elsie, softly.

"Yes—my mother. Her death altered everything, and took all the charm out of my life. Till I came down here, a month ago, I had not seen Westham for four years," he replied.

"I can feel for you," she replied, softly;

"and can imagine what you must have felt on revisiting it for the first time."

He pressed the little hand that lay on his arm.

"Thanks for your sympathy, which is indeed precious to me. You, too, doubtless, have suffered, and know what it is to have lost a dear friend and companion—for such my mother was to me."

Elsie's cheek paled a little even at this distant allusion to her past.

"Yes; I have had my troubles," she said, in a low voice. "My father died when I was very young, but it was a terrible loss to me. He and Penelope, and—and perhaps one or two others, are the only people who have ever loved me. It was in Nebraska he died."

"And your mother?" asked Ivor.

"I never knew her—she died a few months after my birth. Her grave is in the meadow close by my father's farm, for in those days there was no church near the place, but I have not even a picture of her to tell me what she was like," answered Elsie.

"How sad!" rejoined Ivor, without remarking that sorrow for the loss of her husband had not been mentioned as among her trials.

"You are an orphan, then, like me?"

"Yes; and like Penelope," she replied. "Two nameless waifs, we are, so to speak, from the other side of yon continent," and she pointed inland as she spoke.

"Elsie," he replied, as he glanced in the direction she pointed, and possessing himself of her hand, "do you know, only one thing could have induced me to return to Westham again, and that is the hope of inducing you to remain there with me as my wife, for I love you?"

CHAPTER V.

"SACRED AND SWEET WAS ALL I SAW IN HER."

HE had spoken the words, then, that she had so longed and yet dreaded to hear. For a moment everything around her seemed to grow dim, the sea and sky to be confounded in one blaze of shining brightness, and the little waves that rippled against the rocks at their feet to murmur with a strange, far-off sound in her ears. Her heart almost stopped beating, and she would have slipped from her seat on the rock had not a strong arm sustained her.

"Tell me," said a voice, so familiar, and yet for the moment so strange—a voice that thrilled through her very heart—"tell me, Elsie, that you love me in return. You have had sorrows and troubles in your past life, greater perhaps than mine, even, but we both have suffered. Let the future

bring us both happiness together. What! have I been too sudden—and have I frightened you, Elsie? How pale and troubled you look! Forgive me if I have been too precipitate, and give me an answer to my question. Say you love me and will be my wife!"

In vain Elsie tried to reply; her white lips trembled, her eyes filled with tears, yet her hand lay passive in Ivor Sutherland's; she had neither strength of will nor power enough to withdraw it.

"Surely I cannot be wrong," he continued, pressing her hand to his lips, "or else you would tell me so?"

His words, and the kisses he pressed on her little hand, suddenly recalled her to herself. She withdrew her hand and strove to release herself from his clasp. Silas Jorsson's threat rung in her ears, and seemed at that moment to be the death-knell to her happiness.

"I am wrong!—I am wrong!" she cried. "But do not think—do not imagine— Ah!" as a stern look came into Ivor's face—"I make you angry; you think I have been trifling with you? But it is not so."

"Then if you have not been trifling with me," he answered, his brow clearing, "why all this agitation, my darling? Say you love me and all will be well."

"But you know nothing of me—nothing of my history," cried Elsie, eagerly. "If you did know—if you had known, you would never have said such words to me as you said just now."

A horrible doubt shot through Ivor Sutherland's mind.

"What!" he cried; "have I been deceiving myself? Are you not free?"

"Free?" cried Elsie, for a moment bewildered. "Ah! I see—you mean am I a widow; have I the right to—to marry again? Yes; there is no doubt of that." And she laid a peculiar emphasis on the last word.

"Thank Heaven! Then there is nothing that need separate us, if you only love me," he cried, taking her hand again.

"But you do not know my history—my origin. You are of a proud family, and might not like to know that your wife was the daughter of a Nebraska farmer—a real farmer, I mean, not one of your fine gentlemen who play at farming in this part of the country—and when I was a girl, I had to take my part in the household work—work that Louise or Jansen would think themselves quite above, and—"

Ivor stopped her with a merry laugh.

"If that is all you have to urge against my making you my wife you may save yourself the trouble. It does seem wonderful that

these tiny hands should have had any hard work to do. I cannot believe it. But they are none the less dear to me for that. Honest labor never yet lowered man or woman, and—"

"But that is only one reason against it—one of many," cried Elsie, eagerly, her face flushing. "You know I married, and—"

"Yes; and you lost your husband. It must have been a sad trial to you, but I will try and make you as happy as—as you were before," he replied in tones so serious, yet so loving, that they pierced to Elsie's heart.

How could she ever tell him all—the whole truth?

She turned away.

"I did not love my husband. I was not happy with him!" she said.

There was a pause. Then Ivor spoke again.

"My poor darling! Then you were forced to marry him, no doubt?"

"Perhaps—not forced exactly, but circumstances were too strong for me. When my father died I went to my aunt, Pen's mother. Pen was a child then, and could not help me. My aunt was jealous of me, for she was still a youngish, fashionable, and handsome woman. Mr. Smith was a friend of Pen's father's. He thought me in the way—one too many in the house, and my aunt would often reproach me with living on her bounty; and I believe, if it had not been for what the world said, would have packed me off to earn my own living. Pen, the darling! always loved me, and was good to me, but she was but a child; and when Mr. Smith proposed, every one took it as a matter of course that I should accept him."

"Poor child!" murmured Ivor, drawing her toward him.

"No; don't pity me. I was very wrong. I ought to have gone out as a common servant rather than marry him, but his riches attracted, or, at any rate, smoothed the way to my accepting him. Well, he was forty years my senior, and I was only eighteen. He might have treated me with some consideration when we were married, but it seemed my aunt had made him believe—Heaven knows I was not to blame on that point—that I loved him; and when he found out his mistake, the love which it seems he really felt for me was turned to the bitterest hate, and my life was made more miserable than it could possibly have been had I either stayed with my aunt or gone out as a servant. It was a just punishment to me. I should have been firm, and refused; but I am weak—weak as water. And, oh, beware—beware, if you love me—"

"If!" he exclaimed passionately, folding

her in his arms. "Elsie, believe me, I do! I—"

"Hush! hush! Hear me to the end," cried Elsie, releasing herself again from him by a great effort; for the great love she felt for him, and the true, unfeigned affection he experienced for her, were casting their spells over her, and she longed to say nothing more of her past, but to give herself up without restraint to the happiness of the present, which might be hers if she would but take it. "Hush! there is more, much more to tell you. My husband was not a gentleman. No; your farm hands—our gardener, James, have more of the gentleman in them than had Mr. Smith, rich as he was. He made all his money in *pork-packing*, I believe, and was once a common workman, afterward a contractor, then a speculator (but that matters little now). Soon he made my—our names the talk of all Omaha; our quarrels, the scenes of violence and discord and worse in our house, were common themes of talk in all the billiard saloons and hotels my husband frequented, as well as of all the drawing-rooms in which I made my appearance. At last things came to a climax. We had a violent scene, more violent than I care to recall. My husband left me, and the next time I saw him" (and Elsie's voice grew hoarse, and her manner wild and agitated) "he was a corpse—yes, the next time I saw him, he was dead!"

"He died suddenly, then?" said Ivor, pained and grieved at her extraordinary agitation.

"Yes, very suddenly; he was shot down—murdered! I—I never saw him alive again."

"You poor thing!—how terrible, my poor darling Elsie! It will require all my love to make you forget the past and all its sad associations. What a shock it must have been to you! And all this happened not two years ago!" replied Ivor, with deep tenderness in his voice,

"Ah! but you don't know all people said about it—about me! They were cruel—cruel," she murmured as she felt his strong arm around her again, and felt what a protection against the shafts of the world and her enemies the love of a man like Ivor Sutherland would be. "I did not love him—nay, I positively hated him at times; but his death—his murder—was a shock—a fearful shock to me; but I believe every one thought I looked on it simply as a happy release, at which I rejoiced, and—and—"

Her secret—the secret that Silas Jorrison held *in terrorem* over her—was trembling on her lips. She wished to be quite open, quite honest with this man who was offering her his heart and an honorable unsullied name. Her heart beat quick—a choking in her

throat stopped the words she would fain have spoken, and Ivor Sutherland spoke again.

"Nothing more likely, my darling, than the world, which is ever ready to throw a stone at the unfortunate, should have delighted itself by speaking ill of you; but what is all that to me?"

"Ah! but—but you don't know half that was said—how I was blamed—the motives of my marriage held up to public execration, and even the blame of my husband's death cast on me!" she answered. Her breath almost failed her, and her voice sunk to a whisper as she added, "The murderer was never discovered—the whole thing was very mysterious, and the world made the worst of it."

"As it always does of everything, my love," he replied. "And now you have told me all, love, and if you had told me fifty times more, you would not have altered my determination to make you my wife, if only you can give me your love. Elsie, my poor, ill-used darling, can you not love me? Tell me!"

"Love you?" she replied, dreamily. "I have known so little all my life of love; but I don't think any woman could love you better than I do. Only—oh, after what I have told you, can't you see, it would be madness in you to marry me? But—yes, yes—I love you! Now go, leave me. The tide has turned, you can round the point now!"

"Leave you, when you tell me you love me?" cried Ivor, with a happy laugh, clasping her once more joyfully to his heart, and covering her beautiful face with kisses. "Elsie, you are laughing at me. Darling, we will never part again. I will never leave you more, till death do us part."

The words made Elsie shudder. It seemed as if, innocent as she was of all evil, that death—a dead man—stood ready to part them.

"My over-sensitive darling! to think that because vile, evil tongues have dared to speak ill of you—to blight your fair name—that I should heed them—I who would cheerfully lay down my life and all I hold dear for you! Never look back again to those sad days, my Elsie. Let them be forgotten; trust in me. Who can injure you when you are my wife!"

He spoke proudly and confidently, and Elsie's drooping spirits were cheered by his words. Perhaps, as Penelope said, she was foolish to think so much of Silas Jorrison's threat. Once the wife of Ivor Sutherland, what could he do to harm her? Pen was right; Ivor Sutherland would never listen to the insinuations of a reptile like Silas.

So the dark cloud passed away, and a

happy, peaceful sense of security and protection stole into Elsie's heart as she sat on the rocks with her lover, the little waves rippling further and further away each minute from them, as if inviting them to follow and return on their homeward way along the shore. A bright smile played on her lips, and her deep, violet eyes looked up into the dark eyes of Ivor Sutherland, without a cloud to obscure their tender light. She was happy—happier far than she had been since those early, innocent days in Nebraska—happier a thousand-fold than she had ever believed it possible for her to be again in this world.

Soon the sinking sun warned the lovers that it was high time to be on their way home, and leaning on Ivor's arm, she walked slowly over the shining sand toward the cottage.

"We are late. What will Pen think?" she said, as she looked at her watch.

"Pen will guess; she knows more about us than we imagine, I believe. I don't believe Pen will have waited tea for us," replied Ivor, laughing.

"I may tell Pen, of course?" said Elsie, imploringly.

"Certainly! If you didn't, she'd find it out for herself in five minutes," he replied.

"But I shall tell no one else; need we?" she went on, eagerly.

"Certainly not, if you don't wish it. I've no one I'm obliged to inform of my intentions, darling. We will do just as you like about it," he answered. "Here we are, and there is Pen on the lawn."

"Late, as usual," began Pen. And then she stopped, and looking at the couple, gave a little scream of delight. "Elsie—Mr. Sutherland! I know it—I know it! Elsie, tell me I am right. Mr. Sutherland, speak!"

"Yes, you are right; she has promised to be my wife!" cried Ivor, exultingly.

"You dear, dear things!" cried Pen, taking a hand of each, and then kissing Elsie. "I knew long ago it would end in this way!"

CHAPTER VI.

LOVE AND JEALOUSY.

"WELL, Elsie," cried Penelope, as soon as Ivor Sutherland had left them, "I am more delighted than I can tell you at this good news; but you look tired and sad. Cheer up. Are you mourning over Ivor's departure? To-morrow will soon come."

"Foolish child!" replied Elsie, with a rather sad smile. "No; I was thinking, happy as I feel, and much as I love him, have I done right in accepting him?"

"Always harping on the old string!" cried Pen, lightly; "but—but I suppose you had a

grand explanation, a pouring forth of confidences, Elsie; and you told him—"

"All about my past life, and our circumstances; of my unhappy marriage, and Mr. Smith's death; and how—even how people blamed me as being the cause of it; but I could not—I could not bring myself to tell him exactly the form their blame took, nor to speak of Silas Jorrison's threat; you, yourself, said no man of honor would heed his words. But you look grave, Pen; you don't think I ought to have told him do you?"

Pen looked uneasy, but Elsie's face of horror softened her.

"I always advocate perfect openness between lovers, you know, Elsie, but perhaps you were not called upon to mention Jorrison's impertinence to Mr. Sutherland."

"And he said he did not care what the world might have said of me," put in Elsie, eagerly.

"No doubt he would not, so you might have told the whole story without any fear of alarming him. However, perhaps it was not necessary, so don't look so down-hearted, there's a dear. I've got news to tell you, Elsie,"—and she drew a letter from her pocket.

"And you've never mentioned it all this time!" cried Elsie.

"Thinking of something else, you see. Well, Laurence Gower will be here to-morrow; he's found that the sketching about here is supposed to be remarkably good, and, therefore, has taken rooms at the little hotel in Westham for a month. Isn't that delightful? But what's the matter? Don't you like the idea of his coming, Elsie? Why, it will take me quite out of your way, you ungrateful creature, for I am an artist in my poor way, and mean to do a great deal of sketching, too."

"Indeed, you are wrong; I'm very glad Mr. Gower is coming; it must often have been dull for you here, dear, I fear, all alone."

"Well, I fear I've not acted propriety as I ought, to have satisfied society prejudices, and therefore have been a good deal alone; but I haven't been dull, for all that!" retorted Penelope. "And now I intend to use all my pent-up energies in teasing Mr. Gower."

"Don't carry that too far," retorted Elsie. "Mr. Gower, I can see, does not always understand your chaffing ways, Pen."

"He'll have to learn to comprehend them some day—that is, if—" And she stopped short and blushed.

"If!—well, I don't see there is much doubt in the matter; only, in my turn, let me give

you a word of warning, Pen. Mr. Gower is sensitive, and wants gentle treatment; he is an excellent fellow, in every way suited to you. Take care and do not let your wit wound him too deeply, nor inflict an injury where you mean only to implant a passing sting."

"My dear Elsie, what a sermon! — you quite amaze me!" cried Pen, in mock astonishment. "Poor dear Mr. Gower! fancy my inflicting any serious injury on him, a poor, weak little person like me!"

"Go, go!" cried Elsie, laughing; "I see you are in one of your incorrigible humors to-night. Here, take your letter, and be sure to put it under your pillow to dream on. But stay a moment," (and a look of anxiety came into her eyes). "Mr. Gower has travelled—he has been in the West, hasn't he?"

"Well, years ago I believe he went out somewhere in the wilderness, on a buffalo-hunt, with a party of Englishmen, but that's all," replied Pen, rather puzzled at the question.

"Well, Ivor and I have settled to say nothing of our engagement to any one; at any rate not at present, so you must not tell Mr. Gower of it till I give you leave, remember," said Elsie earnestly—so earnestly that Penelope looked at her sharply.

"Just as you like, my dear, of course," she replied; "but"—with a laugh—"I think Mr. Gower will soon find it out for himself."

Oddly enough, when Mr. Gower called next day and found Mr. Sutherland already in the pretty drawing-room of Leigh Cottage, with Elsie sitting on the sofa, working, and Penelope arranging a great basketful of hot-house flowers in an old china bowl on the table, he did not take in the situation at all, and in a moment his heart was wrung with a jealous pang, and all sorts of doubts and suspicions entered his brain. Had not Penelope encouraged him in every way before she left town?—and yet here she was arranging flowers with Mr. Sutherland, that he had evidently brought her, and there was Mrs. Smith sitting all alone on the sofa, acting the part of chaperon to her cousin!

Penelope's smile of welcome and unaffected pleasure at seeing him again chased away some of these grim shadows for a time, but as the evening went on they returned.

Mr. Sutherland was evidently quite at home in the cottage, much more so than he had been at the city house. Penelope treated him with something almost more than friendliness, and Mrs. Smith looked on quite calmly at her. Mr. Sutherland had evidently stolen a march on him, and had been making hard running while he had been idling away his time at his guardian's place in Newport.

"Do you ever sketch now, Miss West," he inquired, "or have other and more engrossing occupations taken the place of art in your daily life?"

"Indeed, I don't think Penelope has had any occupation since we have been here. We have literally idled our time away in a delicious *dolce far niente*, with Mr. Sutherland to show us all the beauties of this lovely place and to take care of us," put in Elsie; "but now you have come—"

"Oh! I beg Miss West will not allow me to interrupt the even tenor of her way," he replied, sulkily, while Penelope's dark gray eyes sparkled with a mischievous twinkle.

"I think I shall be able to spare a little time from my idleness for my favorite occupation," she said, quietly. "I had thought of going down to Put-in Bay to-morrow, to complete a sketch I began a day or two ago, and was going to ask Mr. Gower if he would accompany me; but perhaps, as he thinks my love of art has waxed lukewarm, he might not care to come. At any rate, Mr. Gower, you'll look at my poor production and give me the benefit of your advice, won't you? It's here in the next room, which for the present is my studio. What do you think of that for a view?" she continued, holding up an unfinished water-color. "Will not such lovely scenes as this chase away the cloud of care I see on your brow, and soothe your troubled spirit?"

"Penelope, you are very hard on me," cried the young man. "I have not seen you for a month, and came here expecting to pass an evening alone with you."

"It seems to me we are alone!" put in Pen, raising her well-marked eyebrows, and looking innocently into his face.

"Nonsense!—with that fellow there in the next room, who'll be following us in a minute," went on Laurence Gower.

"I hardly think he'll be rude enough to leave Elsie alone, and I fancy he's had quite as much of my company this past month as he cares for," she replied quietly. "Come, Mr. Gower, be reasonable; you, who are such a lover of art, should understand how I am longing for, yet dreading, your criticism on my work. Tell me, do you think it pretty?"

"Very nice—very pretty—a lovely piece of coloring!" he replied.

"And this?" she went on, putting a small finished drawing into his hand.

"Excellent!" he cried, really impressed by her skill.

"Well, you see, I have not been quite so idle as Elsie made out. Now, are you inclined to come down to Put-in Bay to-morrow, my good friend, or no? If you are, I will be ready at ten o'clock."

"Of course I shall be delighted; but will

your other 'good friend' be in attendance too?" he replied, glancing toward the drawing-room door.

"Hardly, at such an early hour. I suppose, however, if we found he drops in to lunch you wouldn't go off to your hotel in a dungeon, especially if I beg of Elsie to take him off my hands as much as possible. Indeed, I think I had better make him over to Elsie altogether, as I foresee our celebrated (in the future) series of sketches of the Long Island coast will not be as successful as I intended they should."

She spoke quite calmly, with a little smile on her lips. Gower looked up to her, and wondered if Mrs. Courtland's words, "the greatest flirt in New York," could really be applied to her with justice. Doubtless she had been fooling poor Sutherland to her heart's content all the last month, and yet here she was at the first word from him, or perhaps only because she thought he might really stand in the way of her drawing plans being successfully carried out, willing to turn the poor man over to her cousin, and dispense with his further attentions then and there!

"Well, won't you speak? Doesn't my plan suit you? Is there no pleasing you?" she went on, in a petulant, complaining little voice. "From what you said just now I really thought the prospect might have been agreeable to you."

"And so it is," he replied, recovering himself; "but I wish I knew—I wish I really knew—"

"What colors I used for that shadow across the water?" interposed Pen, with apparent eagerness. "I'll show you to-morrow, Mr. Gower, if—if you'll only be good-tempered."

"Good-tempered!" he cried, "when you are enough to try the most long-suffering of men. I tell you what, Miss West—"

"Good people, are you quarreling?" said Elsie's sweet voice at the door, while Pen burst into a silvery laugh. "Come and have some coffee, and see the moonlight shining on the sea. It is beautiful, and calculated to calm the most ruffled feelings."

"You have tried him dreadfully. Beware, Pen!" said Elsie, a few days after, when such a scene as has just been described had occurred over and over again.

But the spirit of mischief had taken possession of Penelope, and she was wilder and more wayward than ever, till at last Laurence Gower, hurt and harassed, yet loving her more than ever, resolved to bring matters to a climax.

"Mrs. Smith," he said, coming into the drawing-room one morning when he knew Pen was out, and tormented himself with

the idea that she was in Ivor's company, "I want you to tell me the truth. My happiness depends on it, so you must speak out. Is your cousin—is Miss West engaged to Mr. Sutherland?"

"Penelope engaged to Ivor Sutherland!" cried Elsie in such evident surprise that Laurence saw at once that this was the first time such an idea had been broached before her.

"Yes; she is constantly in his company. He is always here. She treats him with as much—nay, more friendliness than she does even me, who she knows loves her, and who once believed—was sure—"

"Mr. Gower, believe me," cried Elsie, eagerly, recovering from her surprise, and seeing at a glance how the jealousy in the breast of the over-sensitive young fellow had been aroused—"believe me, Pen is not engaged to Mr. Sutherland or to any one else."

"No?—are you sure of that? If I could be so, I should be a different creature. At times I feel half-mad! Often, when I have left here of an evening, I have almost made up my mind never to return—yet I am here still, for I love her; but she trifles with me cruelly, and if she is not engaged—"

"And I assure you she is not," interrupted Elsie.

"Then why does she treat me so?" he cried. "She seems to delight in raising my jealousy and seeing me writhe beneath her sarcasms."

"Her sarcasms! You are hard on Pen, Mr. Gower. I'm sure she doesn't mean to hurt you; and—forgive me for telling you so—you often take offense at what is never intended to offend," replied Elsie. "Pen has too good a heart to be really cruel or heartless, and I believe—mind, I have no right to say so, but it is my belief—cares for you far more than you imagine. For Ivor Sutherland, I know, her feelings are simply those of friendship, and nothing more."

"Dear Mrs. Smith," cried Laurence, starting up and seizing her hand, which he pressed to his lips, "how happy you have made me!"

"Am I to congratulate you?" said a meek voice at the door, which made them both start; and there stood Pen, her gray eyes positively sparkling like diamonds and full of fun and mischief.

"Pen, for shame!—you should know better," said Elsie, laughing and blushing; "but Mr. Gower has something to say to you, so I shall take my departure." And she left the room.

"You know very well what I have to say, Penelope," he said, taking her hand.

"Yes, I think so," she replied, all the fun

and mischief dying out of her eyes and a serious expression taking its place. "I am not to tease you, and not to make believe to flirt and—"

"More than that, you are to love me as I love you; to be mine forever; never to quarrel!"

"Not even to have the pleasure of making it up?" she murmured, pitifully, while he went on, without heeding her.

"Never to hide anything from me, and never to make me miserable again, as you have made me this month past."

"Oh, if I make you miserable—" began Pen, with a spark of her former mischief.

"Now don't begin again. Don't mock me now; you must be serious or I shall be obliged to leave you, Pen," he said, and his voice was full of real pathos. "Tell me, am I to be the happiest of men, or the most wretched? It rests with you."

"Be happy, then, Laurence," she said, in a low tone. "I will never be naughty and mischievous again."

There was a short silence. Laurence had taken her in his arms and kissed her, and they sat side by side, her hand in his, for a few moments.

"But I do love teasing you," she whispered, a few minutes later.

"As long as you love me, Pen, I don't care; but are you sure you don't care one bit for Sutherland—that all your heart is mine?"

"Quite sure," she said; and for the first time for many a day, Laurence Gower felt perfectly contented, and at rest with all the world.

The time of Elsie's wedding had already been fixed. It was to take place quietly in New York, and the bride and bridegroom were to go to the mountains for a fortnight, and then return to Crest Lawn to take up their residence there for good, and Penelope was to be there to receive them.

"Cannot I tell Laurence of your engagement now, dear?" said Pen, a few days later. "He leaves us in a day or two, you know."

"Nay, wait a little longer," urged Elsie. "When he is well away from Westham, then tell him, dear."

"Why are you so careful to hide your secret, Elsie?" she replied. "However, it shall be as you wish."

It was two days later that Penelope said good-by to her lover, and Elsie's secret remained untold.

CHAPTER VII.

A RECREANT LOVER.

A COUPLE of days passed, and no letter came to Penelope from Laurence Gower. The first day she took it easily enough, saying that with all men she knew that "out of sight was out of mind;" but the second day she looked anxiously amid the little pile of letters on the cottage breakfast-table, and after a fruitless search, her disappointment at not finding one from Laurence was so great that for a few moments she could not speak; the third and fourth mornings she was up and at the gate to meet the postman, and when no letter from her lover rewarded her for her pains, re-entered the house with eyes filled with tears and lips trembling. The sixth day, however, as she came into the breakfast-room, there lay beside her plate the long-looked-for epistle; and seizing it joyfully, and giving a happy "Good-morning!" to Elsie and Ivor Sutherland, the latter of whom had just come in, she strolled out onto the broad gravel walk, to read her letter in peace.

"Dear child! I am so glad the letter has come at last. She has been fretting for it, and it ought to have come sooner," said Elsie, following her cousin with eyes of affection. "But, goodness me! I hope it contains no bad news!"

For Penelope had staggered, and the letter had fallen from her hand.

"What can it be? Oh, I believe it's all right, after all! She has picked it up, and is reading it through again! We shall soon hear all about it!" went on Elsie. "Come, Ivor, let me give you a cup of tea, and tell me what you propose to do to-day?"

So they fell into talk; and not till Penelope entered the room again, looking white, and with a strange sarcastic smile on her lips, did they think of the letter again.

"Well, darling, how is he?" said Elsie, hardly looking up. "Tell us all the news. Your tea is quite cold, I fear."

"The news!" cried Penelope, with a jarring laugh. "I'll bet you a dozen pairs of Harris's best gloves, Elsie, you'll not guess the news this letter contains. I—I don't even think" (and her voice faltered for an instant) "that I quite understand or realize it myself."

"Why, what do you mean, Pen? How horribly white you are! And, for goodness sake, don't tremble like that! Ivor, help her; she is going to faint!" cried Elsie, starting up.

"No, no; I'm not given to fainting. Don't alarm yourself, Ivor," she answered, dropping into a chair. "One generally expects

to be a little overcome by a lover's first letter, you know; but it is rarely one finds oneself called a traitor, a deceiver, a miserable adventuress, the greatest flirt in New York, etc., in it. Herc, read it, Elsie, and tell me what it is I have done to make Mr. Laurence Gower write to me in this strain."

"He must be mad—mad with jealousy! It's all a mistake, Penelope, darling; he will see that soon!" cried Elsie, in amazement.

"It's a mistake I don't like, and I shall find it difficult to forget!" said Pen, in a hard voice. "Here, Ivor, read it, too."

It ran thus:

"I was a fool to believe you really loved me—the greatest flirt in New York—'a wretched adventuress,' as Courtland and others said. Scarcely twenty-four hours after I had bid you good-by I found you faithless to me. I could not believe it at first; but at last I was forced to, for who can doubt the evidence of their own eyes? I will never see you or write to you, or receive a letter from you again. You have deceived me—lied to me!"

"When this reaches you I shall be far away, and beyond the reach of any communication from you. I will say nothing of your wretched cruelty to me. I shall suffer from it, perhaps, for life; but as for you, it will doubtless trouble you little, and in a week or two you will forget that such a wretched being exists as

"LAURENCE GOWER."

"The man must be mad, or a born fool!" cried Ivor, his face flushing with anger and shame for the recreant lover. "What can he possibly mean?—what can he have heard?"

"Oh, do not trouble yourself to guess, Ivor," replied Penelope, with a calm, cold voice. "A man who could write me a letter like that, who could insult me so cruelly himself, and repeat the insults he has heard others heap on me, is not worth remembering or regretting. Give me the letter. There!"—tearing it into a thousand pieces—"let's forget it! He is right; in a week I shall have forgotten that such a man exists! Give me some tea, Elsie; I feel very thirsty; the morning is so hot and close."

"But, Pen, you will write to him?" said Elsie.

"What I? The wretched adventuress? Never! Elsie, what are you thinking of? Besides, I could not if I would. I don't even know where he is gone to," she answered.

There was a sort of a suppressed sob in her voice as she spoke.

"There, don't talk to me of it again!" she said. "Let's forget—forget, if we can! Now, Elsie, tell me what are you going to do to-day?"

Ivor looked at Elsie, but the latter knew Pen's humors too well to cross them; and though the tears kept coming into her eyes now and again, she strove to discuss with her cousin the plans for the approaching marriage.

"When she has a little got over the first shock she will talk to me about Mr. Gower, Ivor," she said. "Meanwhile, darling, you must try to find out where he has gone. Penelope will soon soften her humor, poor dear; but I don't think either I or she will ever forgive him."

But days and weeks went on, and no change came over Penelope. She never wept; she never spoke of Laurence Gower; she went about her usual business in her usual manner. It was only by a certain hardness in her voice and manner, a certain bitterness in her mode of speech, that Elsie could discern how terribly the wound rankled in her bosom; how deeply she felt the wrong that had been done her, even more deeply than the loss of her love.

The wedding-day drew near. Crest Lawn had been all prepared for the reception of Ivor and his bride. The *trousseau* had been ordered, and the few—the very few guests that were to be invited to the marriage had been informed when and where it would take place.

Leigh Cottage had been dismantled of the thousand and one pretty knick-knacks the ladies had put into it, and all were removed to the suite of rooms at Crest Lawn. Penelope was to call her own; and finally the last trunks were packed, and the bridal party started for town.

Elsie looked lovely in her simple pearl-gray robe, far more lovely than she had looked eight years before in all the glories of shining white satin and point lace, flowers, diamonds, and flowing vail, Penelope thought. And what a contrast between the bridegroom of to-day and the man Elsie had eight years ago been almost forced to marry! How happy and radiant she looked to-day; how pale and heavy-eyed she had been on that other occasion!

"We seemed to have changed places," thought Penelope. "I was the happy, thoughtless child, without a care or a sorrow, then; now I have an aching heart which I strive to conceal, as Elsie, who looks all peace and joy now, strove then to hide hers."

As the service went on, Pen had hard work to repress her feelings. Once she had hoped ere long—perhaps on that very day—to be one of the principals in a like ceremony, but all her hopes were shattered, and she felt that for her the bridal morning would never shine.

"Three times a bridesmaid, never a bride," says the proverb, in which case I have done for myself this morning," she thought, with a sad smile. "Never mind; I shall take care of Elsie's children, and she and Ivor

will let me live at Crest Lawn, and grow old and comfortable along with them; and then every one can point at me not only as being an exemplification of the proverb, but also as a warning to all young ladies—being an old maid after having been the greatest flirt in New York."

"What are you thinking of, dear?" said Elsie, who, with Pen's help, was now changing her wedding for her traveling dress. "You look so grave. I'm very selfish; but I feel so happy myself, I can't bear to see any one looking sad; and—and I, Pen, can't help being sure your trouble will all come right in the end."

Pen shrunk back as if she had been stung.

"Don't! I can't bear to talk of it yet, Elsie. But you are right time will cure it, no doubt."

"And you won't be dull when I'm gone?" said Elsie.

"Dull, with Mrs. Carter? Impossible!" said Pen, with a laugh. "I shall go back to my old life, and be as gay as a bird, darling, never you fear."

And with this assurance Elsie was obliged to be content, for the carriage was at the door, and she heard her husband calling for her.

"Now, Elsie; we shall be late! Pen, don't let her linger; the train won't wait, remember!" he cried.

So, with another kiss, they parted; and for the first time since she received Laurence Gower's letter, Pen burst into a fit of hysterical crying.

"Poor dear—poor dear! how fond she is of her cousin!" said good-natured Mrs. Carter; "but she will soon be back, my dear; and be sure, after a time she will be tired of burying herself alive in Westham, and come back to town, like a sensible creature, in the season, and we shall be all comfortable together just as we used to be."

"Do you think so?" sobbed Pen, trying to control herself.

"Yes, indeed I do, my love. I've known so many young couples begin by hiding themselves away in some stupid old country place, but they get over it, and emerge from it in time, and live like other people. By the way, I've a few people to dinner to-night—Will Courtland, your old admirer for one. I tried to find Laurence Gower, but I hear he's off to Colorado or Utah or—no—I think it was Mexico, shooting."

"Indeed!" said Pen, drying her eyes, and her sobs ceasing at once; "I believe he always had a craze for slaughtering inoffensive animals. As to Will Courtland, of course the world could not afford to spare

him, and I presume he has no such propensities."

"No; he is a harmless young fellow enough, only that Mrs. Poindexter used to spoil him; and they say he's taken too much to racing lately. Now, if you are ready, my dear, we will go home," replied the good-natured dowager.

"Quite ready," cried Penelope, starting up. "How foolish I've been to cry like this about—about nothing! I hope my eyes won't be red to-night."

"Your eyes are always lovely, my dear—quite your best point, in fact, so you need not fear," replied Mrs. Carter, gravely. "Now for home, and some tea and a nap, and then you and I will be quite at our best."

Slowly the evening passed by. Mr. Courtland paid much attention to Penelope; for, in fact, he had just won heavily at the Jerome Park races, and in her present exuberant spirits had almost persuaded himself that it would be worth his while to sacrifice himself for love; but Pen was cold and taciturn, and when the party broke up, Mr. Courtland was not able to flatter himself he had made much impression on her.

"Believe she likes that pedantic ass, Gower, who went off to Mexico in that queer way, six weeks ago. But it don't much matter; Maud S. is sure to win again next month, and that ought to console me. But she's pretty—deuced pretty—is Miss Penelope West!"

A few weeks later Mr. William Courtland laid his heart and fortune at Penelope's feet. Needless to say, they were peremptorily rejected by her.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRUTH AT LAST.

MEANWHILE, Laurence Gower, with a heavy heart and wounded, jealous spirit, was far away in California among the wonderful mountains, mines, and canyons for which that country is noted. For weeks and weeks he had wandered away far from the haunts of the white men, into those parts of the interior, and among the tribes of Indians, seldom or never visited by travelers. He had hunted and shot, striven to forget the past and all its troubles; climbed wondrous mountains, crossed unknown passes—done everything, in fact, to chase away from his heart the remembrance of Penelope West, but without success.

"Why did I ever go back that night?" he mused often and often. "What bad angel tempted me to? But I doubted her, and I went back to satisfy my doubts, and they were satisfied! There I saw her, she who but a few hours before had made me believe

she loved me; walking with the man she knew I hated, standing with him in the moonlight by the very garden gate I stood by with her the evening before, when she vowed to be true to me forever! I could hardly believe it at first, but when I saw him wrap the little scarlet cloak around her, as I had done twenty times before, I was forced to! And then—then— But why do I torment myself more with the matter? She never loved me, and maybe she cares no more for *him* than for me—that she is false to us both—the veriest flirt in America!"

Yet for all that, he often felt a pang of the bitterest regret that he should have left New York so abruptly without giving Penelope an opportunity of explaining matters, and in his softer moods his heart would smite him when he thought of his cruel letter to her.

So he wandered on his lonely way, firmly believing that the two figures he had seen at the gate the last evening he spent at Westham were Ivor Sutherland and Penelope; his jealousy blinding his penetration to such an extent that it did not once enter his head that it was Elsie, not Penelope, he had seen. Penelope was the only woman in the world for him, and he could not comprehend that, Penelope present, any man could think of any other woman save her.

"I'd give a good deal to see her—to know what she's doing now," he thought, as he sat in the door of the shanty that served him for a shelter far up in some unfrequented hills; and he threw himself, with a groan, on the short dry turf beside him.

"What's wrong, mate?" said a rough voice close to him, that caused him to start to his feet in an instant. "You seem uneasy—I hope it ain't my complaint you're suffering from."

"And what's that?" asked Laurence, with a keen glance first at his rifle and then at his interlocutor, while his hand felt for the knife he always wore at his side.

The man noticed his gesture, and laughed harshly.

"No need for that, mate. I'm a harmless fellow enough, on my way from the mines over there, to home—Omaha, that is—if I ever manage to get there; but I'm famished with hunger and thirst, and worn out with fever and hard work. You're not one of us, but maybe ye can give me a shelter and a meal o' some'at."

"Come in, come in; I've enough and to spare," replied Laurence, a glance at the man's fever-stricken face showing that, at any rate, some part of his story was true, and that he was in need of both food and shelter.

He ate like a ravenous creature: and then, the pangs of hunger satisfied, grew more communicative.

"My mate played me an ill trick," he said, "and we're old friends, we are, he and me. I was took ill two months ago, and he left me to live or die, sink or swim, as best I might. I'd not have done the like by Siley; but he's a treacherous dog, and I'll be even with him, big man as he thinks himself."

"And where's he gone?" asked Laurence.

"To Omaha, with a fortin' in his belt. I guess he don't think I'll ever get there to claim my share, but we shall see. A night or two here (by your leave, stranger), and a meal or two like this, will set me up. You'd not believe me, but I've walked a hundred miles in three days, and slept out. It's only when the fever takes me I'm not my own man, and fear to be alone."

Ard so it seemed, indeed; the stranger lay down to sleep soon after, and soon, by his tossing and muttering, Laurence knew that the foe was grappling with him. He struck a light, and as it fell on the haggard face before him, he saw at once that his visitor was far enough from being his own man, as he termed it.

It was a strange, wild face—unshaven, unwashed, the hair and beard grizzled, and the eyes wild, and almost terrified in their expression as they wandered round the hut.

Laurence sat watching him for some time, and gradually the unintelligible mutterings were hushed, the fever fit was passing away, and at length the stranger fell into a deep sleep; and Laurence, turning in, fell asleep likewise.

It was late when he woke, and the sun was high in the heavens. He started up and looked for the stranger, whom he found coolly sitting at the door of the hut, while on the fire he had kindled bubbled and boiled a tin of coffee.

"Preparing breakfast, you see, mate," he said, with a smile. "Guess you're a hard sleeper; you never heard me move, though I made noise enough. Reckon I had a bit of fever last night, for I didn't know when I got up quite where I was, till my eye caught sight of you lying there; then I remembered. Did I jabber, now, much, stranger?" And he looked up with an inquiring glance into Laurence's face.

"You chattered a bit; not much—not like some fellows I've seen," he replied shortly.

The man dropped his eyes with a look of satisfaction, while Laurence, going into the shanty again, produced the remains of a deer's quarters, from which he cut slices and prepared to fry them at the fire beside which his guest was now seated,

"Are you thinking of going East?" asked the man in a few moments. "But you're no Westerner, I'm thinking—a New Yorker, I reckon?"

Laurence nodded.

"I'm half thinking of starting Eastward; but I'm hardly tired of this part of the world yet."

"If you were, we might join company," replied the man.

"Yes, maybe," replied Laurence, not feeling, however, that the company was much to his taste.

The man guessed his thoughts, and laughed again.

"You mightn't find me such a bad companion as you fancy. I know the ways of these parts, which, excuse me, is more than most travelers do; and it's a rough part of the world, I tell you."

"So it seems," said Laurence; "and yet I've done well hitherto."

"Not been too near the mines, I fancy," replied he. "Well, stranger, with your leave, I'll bide here to-day and to-night, and start on my journey to-morrow."

"Stay and welcome," replied Laurence, "and to-morrow I'll come part of the way down the mountain-side with you. I've done the shooting about here pretty well."

But when the morrow came it seemed little likely that for many days the stranger would be able to start again on his homeward path. He raved and tossed in the delirium of fever, and when it left him, lay weak as a child, almost unable to move hand or foot.

Laurence nursed him night and day, and soon found that he had a man of many adventures, as well as of a shattered constitution, to deal with, and often he doubted if his visitor—Tim, as he called himself without further style or title—would ever leave the lonely little shanty on the great mountain's side again.

At length, however, he gave signs of recovery. The fever fit had spent its force, and slowly he grew stronger.

His gratitude to Laurence, who, as he said, had "nursed him like a babby," knew no bounds; there was nothing he would not have done for him to show it; and Laurence, on his side, had taken a liking to the big, rough fellow, who for so many days had been his one companion and sole care.

"I must be going on my ways, mate," said Tim, one day, after sitting for many minutes in silent meditation, the day's work, such as it was, over. "Siley's got two months' start of me, and I dare say flatters himself the vultures have got me by now; but he didn't reckon I should find a nuss on the hill-side all

ready and waiting to cure me when he'd left me in the lurch, the villain!"

"You're not very fit for traveling yet," remarked Laurence, shortly.

"No, mayhap not, 'specially alone; but I must take my chance," he answered.

"And how long will the journey take you?" asked Laurence.

"Not long after I'm once out of the mountains," he replied.

"Maybe we shall meet again some day," went on Laurence, after a pause. "I'm getting tired of my life here, and—"

"Why not tramp it with me now?" said the man, eagerly, his eyes flashing. "Look here, stranger, you've been a good friend to me—saved my life, you have; and Tim the Miner, as they call me, isn't one to forget. I sha'n't live very much longer. Ah! you didn't think I knew that," as he saw Laurence's look of surprise; "but I know it well enough, and as long as I've life I shall remember you, and if it's ever in my power to help you or stand your friend, I'll do it, you bet; but before I die I must get my gold out of Siley's clutches, and be even with him. Come, say we'll start together, and I'll put off my start till you're ready."

There was an earnestness and sincerity in the man's manner, a depth of gratitude in his tone and way of speaking, that touched and interested Laurence; he was growing weary of solitude, and the journey across country to Omaha in company with his new friend was not a disagreeable idea to him; so, after a short pause, he consented, much to the delight of Tim.

The man was a tolerably loquacious companion during the earlier part of the journey, and it astonished Laurence to find what an amount of fatigue he was able to go through, in spite of his late illness; but as they neared civilized parts the stranger's manner changed. With his uncouth miner's dress he dropped much of his roughness of speech and manner, and when, at Omaha, he appeared clean-shaven, and dressed in a suit of brand new Yankee garments, Laurence hardly recognized him.

He smiled at Laurence's surprise.

"You'll find my partner quite a man of the world here, sir," he said; "although over in California he was reckoned a rougher customer than me by a long chalk. We'll go to the 'Red River Hotel' now, unless there's another you've set your mind on."

Laurence replied that it was all one to him; so to the "Red River Hotel" they repaired, Tim the miner, or Mr. Thomas Benson, as he now chose to call himself, engaging a first-rate apartment for himself, as well as one for Laurence Gower.

Several days passed on, and each day Mr. Thomas Benson was occupied in business of which he gave no account to Laurence, and each day Laurence saw with regret that his cheeks were growing hollow again and his looks haggard. Every night in the smoking-room of the hotel or in the billiard-saloon, he would look inquiringly round, and expectantly at the door as it opened; but Mr. Thomas Benson, though he evidently knew Omaha well, seemed to have no acquaintances among its inhabitants—at any rate, none who seemed to care to look him up.

At last, after three weeks spent at the "Red River Hotel," the man whom Tim was expecting did appear. As he and Laurence were seated in the smoking-saloon, the door opened, and in walked a small, stout man, well-dressed, and wearing a glistening diamond ring on his finger. He looked grave and disturbed, and he started as Tim, jumping up, laid his hand on his shoulder.

"Siley! At last!" he cried.

"What! you here, old fellow? Cheated the fever again, have you?" he replied, with a not over-pleased glance at his old mate. "It's left its mark on you, though."

"Yes; but I'm not dead yet, old fellow. Come, sit by me here: we must have a settling up, you know," replied Tim.

"Oh, yes; of course—of course," replied the other, evasively; "but I've some business on hand I want to consult you about." And his face assumed a crafty expression as he folded and unfolded a ragged, crumpled newspaper he held in his hand. "Look at this, Tim. Don't it remind you of the old days on our ranches? Ay, it's an old paper, and comes from across the continent, but it's only a month ago, soon after I came here, that I came across it. See here—I'll read you a piece of news. You remember Elsie Seagur that was? Well—

"On the 26th instant (four months ago, now), 'Ivor Sutherland, Esq., of Westham, Long Island, to Mrs. Valentine Smith.'"

"Our old friend, Elsie Seagur. But what in the name of all that's reasonable, young man, is that to you?"

And Silas Jorrison turned, with an angry light in his cunning eyes, on Laurence Gowler, while Tim fell back with an imprecation.

"Mrs. Valentine Smith!—did he marry her? Good heavens!" cried Laurence.

"He did, sir; you may take your oath to that," replied Silas, and handed him the paper.

CHAPTER IX.

PARTNERS AND FOES.

Tim, a fierce, angry light in his eyes, started up as Laurence eagerly read the paragraph,

"I've been waiting for you a long time, mate," he said, in a boarse voice. "Come along, now; I'd like to have a little private talk with you."

"In a moment; but I vow I don't feel to care for business of the sort you mean now; not but what you'll find interest in the business I've got on hand here." And he took the paper from Laurence's hand. "You seem a bit put out, as well as this young stranger, at the news."

"I thought Mr. Sutherland was to marry another lady—a cousin of Mrs. Valentine Smith's," faltered Laurence; but Tim had taken Silas Jorrison by the arm, and was dragging him out of the room, so on his ear alone did Laurence's remark fall; it entirely escaped Silas Jorrison.

"Now, tell me," cried Tim, as soon as they were alone, "what deviltry have you in hand as regards Elsie Seagur that was; and then just make over my share in the gold we got together, and those bonds."

"Slow, and softly, my man!" interrupted Silas; "all in good time. The money's safe enough; all lodged in my name just now, but that can soon be altered; but as to that woman. You remember how she played with us both, Tim, eh? I mean—"

"I don't know that she played with me, nor with you either," he replied, roughly. "I loved her. She made fool enough of me, or I made fool enough of myself, about her; and—yes—I hated old Smith, her husband, the man who made her miserable—as miserable as ever she made me; but what's all that now? Let the poor soul be, Siley!"

"Ho, ho! You're mighty forgiving, Tim, you are!" replied Silas, with a scornful laugh; "but I've begun my revenge already. I've been forbearing enough with her. She played me a dirty trick, I tell you, when she married old Bill Smith, and I away West; but as long as she remained Mrs. Smith, wife or widow, I didn't much care. He punished her well for throwing me over."

"You were never engaged to her," interrupted Tim, fiercely. "If I thought you'd ever been, our friendship would have been at an end long ago!"

"Never engaged, but she made me believe she cared for me," retorted Silas, to which Tim replied by a sarcastic laugh. "Well, I believe I should have won her; but as I said, Bill Smith married her, and made her miserable. When I found her in New York last year—ah!" (as Tim started) "I never told you that—I offered to be her husband once more, and she treated me as the dust beneath her feet; but I wasn't hard on her, even then. I said till I saw her married, or going to be married soon, I'd hold my hand."

"As how?" inquired Tim, growing suddenly quiet and collected.

Silas laughed.

"Don't you remember Bill Smith's death, eh?" he said.

"I do," retorted Tim, in an odd voice.

"And what they said in the papers, and what folks said about the murder?" he continued.

Tim shook his head.

"Wasn't in Omaha, and didn't see the papers

much in those days," he answered, in the same tone. "What was it?"

Silas looked at him suspiciously.

"Surely you've heard me say! But if not, you'll see it all in the papers again soon," he answered.

Tim looked at him wildly, and shuddered.

"Come," he said—"come back and have a smoke. I haven't shook off the fever yet, I believe, and the air here chills me. What is this queer start you've taken, Siley? I'd thought you'd something better to think of in these days than old loves and murders."

"Wonder who that young stranger beside you was, and what he knows of Elsie?" continued Silas, in a suspicious tone.

"He's a New Yorker," growled Tim. "Maybe he's met her. He seems to know the fellow who's married her anyway."

"Ah! perhaps. Well, I wish his friend joy! Not nice to marry a woman who's accused, or been accused, or will be accused, of murdering her first husband. Eh?—what's the matter, Tim? Surely you're bad still with fever?" For Tim had staggered, and stood for a moment supporting himself against the wall.

"A twinge, nothing more," he muttered. "Well, good-night. I'm not equal to business this evening, it seems. To-morrow, at twelve, I'll expect you; but take my advice, and don't be bothering Elsie Seagur."

Again Silas laughed.

"I guess she or he, or both, are pretty well bothered by now. You've grown faint-hearted, Tim. I remember the day—"

"Yes, years ago, when I was a boy and a fool, I suppose! Well, good-night."

And Tim staggered off to his private room, and dropping into the arm-chair, fell into a fit of deep thought, while his short, gasping breathing and heaving chest betokened that the subject of his meditations was anything but a pleasant one.

To Laurence Gower, also, the night brought but little repose. Suddenly the whole extent of his foolish jealousy, the injustice and cruelty with which he had treated Penelope West, was revealed to him, and he cursed his blind folly, his unmanly suspicion, that had forever separated him from the woman he loved.

"She will never forgive me!" he thought as he paced restlessly up and down his room. "She is proud and sensitive! I have destroyed no doubt the love she once felt for me, and never in future could she feel confidence in me. A few words, a few lines would have set matters right between us; but I, fool that I was, made it impossible that such words or such lines could be spoken or written. Perhaps by this time she may have forgotten me—perhaps she may love another man; it is six months ago that I left her, and I doubt if she knows even now in what part of the world I am. Why did she never tell me of her cousin's engagement to Sutherland? Perhaps she was under a promise not to tell; but if she had but told me, she would by this time have been my wife. Now perhaps we may never meet again! Oh, Pen! Pen! you should have remembered my weakness and spoken! But what can that queer mate of Tim's know of Mrs. Valentine Smith? Perhaps he may

know Penelope too. I'll ask Tim to-morrow about it. How can her marriage affect him, and why does he seem so bitter about it?"

So, on the morrow, Laurence sought Tim in his apartment, and found him looking pale and haggard, a prey to burning fever, and racked with pain.

He turned his head eagerly as Laurence entered.

"I thought it was Silas," he said. "I don't believe things are as straight with him as he tries to make out, and he hasn't carried out the agreement he made with me when we parted in California. He thought he'd not be troubled with the sight of me again, I reckon. How his head seems full of other matters and—"

"It's about those matters, if you mean Mrs. Valentine Smith's marriage, I came to talk to you," interrupted Laurence eagerly. "Why does he speak of her as if—as if—"

"As if she'd no right to marry. Because he's a fool; and what's worse, a revengeful fool," replied Tim, roughly. "Jorrison had a fancy for her years ago, when she was a slip of a girl; and for that matter, so had others; and, in a way, she threw him over, so he hates her, and vows to have his revenge; but"—and Tim's eyes glowed—"he may go too far. Did you know Elsie, stranger?"

"I knew Mrs. Smith well, and her cousin, Miss West," replied Laurence.

"Ay—little Penelope—I remember her," put in Tim, in a dreamy voice.

"You knew her—you knew Penelope?" cried Laurence in a voice that roused Tim.

"Ay, I knew her—a pretty little child with big gray eyes; but what is she to you?" he replied.

"Nothing now," replied Laurence, with a sigh; "but she was, and it was my fault I lost her!"

"Oh, ho! I see," cried Tim; "then you know Elsie Smith well? How did it all come about? Don't mind telling me, I'm no gossip. If you once loved Penelope West, I once loved" (and his whole rugged face softened) "Elsie Seagur, and even now I'd do anything to serve her; and if Siley torments her too far, I'll have a few words with him about it, you bet."

So Laurence opened his heart to his strange friend, and found no little relief in talking over his troubles for the first time, in spite of Tim's sarcastic remarks on the precipitancy of his flight, and the facility with which he had allowed his own jealous heart to work his ruin.

"But never say die, sir," he concluded. "Go back and tell her you were wrong, beg her pardon humbly, tell her you adore her still, and all will be well. Now I must go and look out for my mate, and see what satisfaction I can get out of him. Ugh! the fever's got hold of me pretty closely to-day." And he staggered across the room. "Come and see me to-night," he added; "I may have something to tell you. I guess we'll do well to find out what mischief Silas is plotting against our old friend."

So Tim passed out of the room, looking shattered and wan, his eyes blazing with a brightness that spoke of the consuming fire of the fever that was gradually bringing him to the grave.

"How the last days have altered him!" thought Laurence, as he followed him slowly. "He is the ghost of what he was a week ago. Poor fellow! I'm afraid his journey has been in vain. I wonder if mine would be in vain if I went home and begged Pen to forgive me? But perhaps I may be too late; for all I know, she may be by this time a married woman."

Whatever Silas Jorrison told Tim of his intentions towards Elsie, or in whatever way the two men settled their business matters that evening, Laurence learnt but little about it. Tim he found, when he visited him in his room, so stern and taciturn that he could scarcely extract a word from him, and it was only just as he was bidding him good-night that he vouchsafed any reference to Elsie or Silas Jorrison.

"You're not thinking of leaving soon for New York, are you?" he said.

"No; I don't think I shall go yet awhile," he replied. "To tell you the truth, Tim, I don't care to leave you when I see you so bad."

The man laughed harshly, but nevertheless wrung Laurence's hand, as if fully sensible of his kindness.

"I sha'n't put any one out for long," he replied, in a husky voice. "Tim the Miner's about come to the end of his time, I guess; but Silas Jorrison's a greater villain than even he believed him. I must smash Siley's little scheme before I say farewell for good to Omaha."

"Do you feel much worse, then?" asked Laurence, anxiously.

"Ay; but before I die I've something I want to say, and a message I want to send to Elsie Seagur that was, just to show her I love her still as I loved her when I was a boy! Her husband won't be jealous—no fear—when she gets the message, and I've a mind that you should be the bearer of it. Will you promise to stay with me till it's all over—till I've said my say?" And he looked imploringly at Laurence, adding, in a low voice, "It won't be long now!"

Laurence gave the required promise, and in a few minutes Tim sunk into a restless, troubled sleep by the fire.

Laurence went back to the reading-room of the hotel. There was a buzz of voices—people talking eagerly together over some newspaper report.

Laurence took up the nearest paper, and began to read. In a moment his face paled and filled with horror, the journal fell from his hands, and the room seemed to be darkened, as he fell back in his chair, scarcely believing he was in his senses.

CHAPTER X.

MORE BITTER THAN DEATH.

To Elsie the months of married life she had passed since the day she gave her hand to Ivor Sutherland had been months of happiness almost greater than she could have imagined it possible to enjoy.

Every day she loved and admired her husband, and learned to appreciate his great and noble qualities better; while he, on his side, as each day passed happily and quietly by, found more and more to love in the beautiful woman he had made his wife.

Penelope had gone to Westham a few days before their return from their wedding tour, and they found everything ready to receive them, and Pen herself at the door, with hearty welcomes and kisses for them, as they drove up.

The weeks and months had positively flown by since then, and to Elsie and Ivor had been a time of unalloyed happiness; and Penelope, in a certain sense, had shared in their happiness.

Only the remembrance of Laurence Gower's extraordinary conduct still troubled her; and even to Elsie, in the midst of her bliss, the thought of Silas Jorrison's threat, "When you are most happy, then dread my revenge!" would sometimes recur, only to be put aside, however, like the remembrance of an evil dream.

One morning, however, as they sat at breakfast, Penelope's watchful eye caught a look of horror in Elsie's face as she opened and began to read a newspaper that had been placed by her plate.

As she continued, her lips turned white, and her hands trembled, and Penelope saw her glance with an agonized look at her husband, who was peacefully perusing the *Tribune*, and then hide her head again behind her own newspaper.

A Western one it was, as Penelope saw, and for an instant she feared that Laurence Gower's name might be in it; that some bad news of him might have reached some paper from Mexico, and found its way into the public print; but, somehow, the idea was quickly dismissed.

It seemed too unlikely; besides, Elsie's emotion was greater than any harm that might have happened to Laurence Gower would have caused.

"Who sent you that paper?" she asked, after a moment.

Elsie started and looked imploringly at her, quite unable to reply.

"Oh, Mrs. Fannington, of course! I recognize her handwriting," went on Pen, understanding her cousin's glance. "Well, Elsie, if you have done, will you come and look at the new dress Madame Devine has sent me from town? I'm dying to have your opinion on it."

With a feeling of intense relief Elsie rose and gratefully followed Penelope to her room. Arrived there, she threw herself on the sofa, buried her face in the cushions, and held out the paper to Pen.

"Read, Pen! Help—advise me! He has been as good as his word. Oh, what shall I do? What will become of me?"

Taking up the paper, Penelope read, her heart almost ceasing to beat as she did so, the following:

"Private information of a very grave character has, we are informed, just come to hand respecting the mysterious murder of our well-known citizen, Mr. William Valentine Smith, late of Third avenue, in this city, who, not two years ago, was found shot through the head in his own grounds, and whose widow, it may be remembered, left our city for New York immediately afterward, under somewhat unpleasant circumstances. The clew just found will be rigidly followed up, and, it is hoped, the culprit brought to justice, even should we have to wait to procure further evidence."

The paragraph went on to describe the facts of the murder, which the writer evidently imagined the public might by this time have forgotten, and did not shrink from pointing, in a veiled and cautious but perfectly evident manner, to the person they suspected of the murder—namely, the wife of the murdered man.

It concluded by observing that Mr. Silas Jorrison, an old and intimate friend of the deceased, would, it was supposed, be able to furnish valuable evidence on several particulars.

For a moment or two after reading the paragraph, Penelope stood trembling with rage and horror before her cousin, who wept and sobbed wildly.

"The brute!" she exclaimed, at last; "I knew him to be a brute and a villain, but I never suspected him of being capable of such a thing as this, for it is all his doing—his bringing about, we may be certain."

"And suppose it should find its way into the New York papers? Suppose Ivor should see it? Oh, Pen! Pen! what would become of me? And suppose—only imagine if they should really—as that wretch hints—accuse me of the murder! Pen, it is too dreadful!—and yet, you know, the look of things was against me."

Elsie said the last words in a terrified whisper.

"Even now—who knows?—the whole thing may be in the very paper my husband is reading!—they may even have telegraphed to New York for my apprehension! Oh, Pen! help me! What can I do? I shall lose everything—Ivor's love and trust! Oh, if I lose that, let them take my life as well; I am better out of the world!"

"Elsie—Elsie! don't work yourself up into such a frenzy," cried Pen, rousing herself from the horror into which the reading of the newspaper had thrown her at the sight of her cousin's terror and misery; "perhaps this may only be a trick of Jorrison's to frighten you. Why don't you tell Ivor all about it? Take this paper now to him, and tell him all. You know him, and how good and noble and just he is, and how he loves you! Are you—can you be still afraid to tell him, Elsie?"

"But think, Pen, how terrible to have to tell I am suspected of murder!—I, his wife! Will he ever forgive me for not having told him the whole story before he married me? And yet," she added, plaintively, "it was my love for him that kept me from it. I so feared to lose him, to lose his love! But you were right, Pen; it would have been far better to be perfectly open; it will be doubly hard to tell him now."

"But do it—do it! I will come with you and help you," cried Pen. "Don't let it come to Ivor through any other source; your whole future happiness may very likely depend on this, Elsie," she answered.

"My future happiness? There is no chance for any more happiness for me," said Elsie, hopelessly.

"Nonsense!" cried Pen; "don't give way so, Elsie, at the first moment! There!"—as the hall door shut—"Ivor has gone out; won't be back till evening, Elsie, for he told me so. Now be good and sensible, take this paper to him when he returns and tell him all."

"The paper—ah! that reminds me. Run

down-stairs, Pen, for Heaven's sake, and bring up the Tribune. What is the date of this paper?—ah! a fortnight old! Perhaps in that very paper he was reading the hateful story may have found a place!" she cried, despairingly.

"Not a bit likely, but I'll fetch it."

And Penelope ran down to the breakfast-room.

She looked in vain for the paper in the breakfast-room, in the drawing-room, and finally in Ivor's study. She rung for the servants—none of them had seen it; and at last she was forced to return to Elsie without it.

"He has taken it out to read in the carriage; he was to drive over to Barnfield in the dog-cart, you know," said Pen, as she saw a fresh look of terror in her cousin's eyes. "Now don't worry yourself any more. You know, as well as I do, you are not guilty of this crime. The worst part of it will be telling the tale of it to Ivor; that once done, Elsie, you will have him to help and comfort you, dear, and carry half your burden."

But Elsie shook her head sorrowfully.

"If I had only done it long ago that might be, dear; but now—"

"Elsie, Elsie," cried Pen, reproachfully, "if you talk in this way, I shall begin to think that you do not really appreciate your good husband as he deserves. He is the last man to refuse you help, or to withhold his love from you when you most stand in need of it. You made a mistake, certainly, long ago, but he will never be hard on you for that; he loves you too well."

"You are always right, Pen," replied Elsie, penitently, "and I always was, and am, and shall be, weak. Oh, if I had not been weak years ago I should never have married as I did, and I should have been quite open with Ivor long ago."

"It is not too late now, dear. Look forward, not back," said Pen.

But Elsie shivered as she spoke, and lay back almost fainting on the sofa.

"I will tell him, Pen, when he comes back," she murmured, at last. "You must help me."

But Ivor did not return that afternoon as was expected; and, almost frantic with excitement, Elsie walked restlessly up and down her room, Penelope vainly endeavoring to calm her, till at length a telegram was put into her hand.

"Do not expect me home till to-morrow, or maybe next day, my darling. Unexpected business has called me to town."

"Business!" cried Elsie. "Oh, he has heard it, Pen! What business can have called him away so suddenly?"

"A thousand things!" she answered, eagerly.

"But, if it is this, take courage, Elsie. See, he calls you his darling still!"

"Yes; but he doesn't know all, perhaps," replied Elsie, covering her face with her hands.

"If he knows anything he must know all!" retorted Penelope. "Come, Elsie, it is time for bed, and you look worn out!"

"Yes, I am tired, but I could not sleep. Oh, why has Silas Jorrison done me this injury, Pen? I treated him and poor Tim Blake just alike—just as a young merry girl with no thoughts of love or love-making would. Tim has never troubled me since the day I told him

he was nothing to me, but Silas has been a thorn in my side; his love has been more deadly to me than the hatred of my bitterest foes!"

It was little sleep either Elsie or Pen had that night, and it was still early when they rose, waiting and hoping for the post to bring them something to gladden their hearts in the shape, perhaps, of a few lines from Ivor; but beyond a few letters of no interest they received nothing, and, strange to say, the *Tribune* failed to make its daily appearance.

"What does it mean?" moaned Elsie. "Oh, how shall I ever meet him, Pen? I feel inclined to run away and bide myself where he will never find me out."

"Not while I am here to prevent you, Elsie!" replied Pen, gravely. "Come, you promised to be brave, but this is rank cowardice to talk of running away!"

"Cowardice!—yes, I am a coward, I know it!" answered Elsie, resuming her seat at the window, and gazing toward the lodge-gates. "I wonder will he be back to-night, Pen?"

But night came without bringing back Ivor Sutherland, and it was with despair at her heart that Elsie at last fell into a deep sleep.

She slept on long into the morning, for Pen would not wake her.

How pale, and fragile, and wan she looked as the sunlight, shining in through the crevices of the shutters, played on her face!

"Has he come?" were her first words as she woke.

"Not yet, darling."

"How late it is!" she went on. "Ten o'clock! He can't have come down by the night-train. He will not be here till the afternoon perhaps. I'd better get up, though, Pen, in case he should arrive earlier than we expect."

So, in sadness and silence, Elsie performed her toilette, made an effort to eat some breakfast, and then went into the drawing-room with Pen.

About an hour after midday the door suddenly opened, and Ivor Sutherland, his face haggard and pale, but filled with a look of ineffable tenderness and love as his eyes fell on Elsie's worn, tear-stained countenance, stood beside them.

"Ivor, Ivor!" cried Elsie, with a half shriek, starting up.

"My poor love, my darling wife!" he cried.

And Elsie was folded to his heart.

"You have heard—you know all—of what I am accused!" she murmured when she could speak.

"Yes," he replied. "Elsie, you must be brave."

"But can you forgive me, Ivor? I was very wrong, wicked, not to have told you before what they said of me really, but—but—I loved you so—I was so afraid of—"

He kissed her silently again and again.

"Do you think it would have made any difference?—do you think I could have believed such a thing of you, my darling?" he said reproachfully.

"And you forgive me for not telling you?" she whispered.

"With all my heart, my poor love! Besides,

it would have altered nothing. But now, Elsie, I can at least help you in your trouble—help you to be brave too, darling, for I fear you have much, very much, to go through yet."

"How?" demanded Penelope and Elsie in one breath.

"They will demand your arrest, my poor love! I went to town and found out all about it," he answered.

"When?" asked Elsie, clinging to him in deadly terror.

"Soon—I can't say when—any day. I have friends who will telegraph to me the moment anything more is heard," he replied sadly.

As he spoke the words, the door opened, and the servant put a telegram into his hand. With a shriek, Elsie fell senseless on the floor, and Ivor, after raising her in his arms and laying her tenderly on the sofa, with trembling bands opened it.

CHAPTER XI.

FOR HER SAKE.

Tim, the miner, or Mr. Thomas Benson, as he was called in the Red River Hotel, grew rapidly worse as the days wore on, and it seemed as if Laurence Gower would not be kept for long in Omaha to perform the service Tim had asked of him, for it was evident to all that the poor fellow had not many days to live.

Silas Jorrison came several times to see him, and Laurence Gower could not but notice the satisfaction with which he received the doctor's bad reports of his former mate's state, nor the gloom that always fell on Tim after one of Silas's visits.

Angry voices were heard proceeding from Tim's room on the occasion of his last visit to his quondam friend; angry words passed between the two men, and Silas left the hotel in a furious rage, vowing never to come near his old mate again.

"He thinks he's got rid of me, and got my money into the bargain; but for once the fool's outwitted himself," said Tim, wiping the perspiration from his forehead as he lay back on his couch. "I shall give Silas Jorrison more trouble, alive or dead, than he reckons on, Mr. Gower. Do you know all this time he's been carrying out his detestable scheme of revenge on Elsie Seagur, poor girl, as well as making away with my property?"

"It was she, then, whom he has hinted at in that horrid paragraph I read a short time ago?" cried Laurence.

"Ay; and I told you Silas might go too far, and that I'd pull him up. He's sent that lying news to New York, and he'll be stirring up the authorities here to reopen the matter and put the poor creature on her trial for the murder of her husband. What! you don't believe it? But it's true, though; he said as much to me just now; but thank the Lord, I can prevent that!"

"You can?" replied Laurence, in surprise..

"Ay, that I can!" replied Tim.

"But how," asked Laurence, "can you prove Mrs. Elsie Smith is innocent?"

"By simply informing the police and the public who was guilty," replied Tim, with a sardonic laugh.

"And you know that?" cried Laurence.

"Yes; I've known it for a long time—a very long time, it seems to me," rejoined Tim. "And before I die I'll tell the tale."

"Is it—is it—did he—" began Laurence.

"He! Who! Silas?" retorted Tim, in a voice of intense contempt. "Bah! Silas is a white-livered scoundrel, who might stab a chap in the back, perhaps, and who isn't beneath any mean crime; but to do an honest, daring murder out and out, and run the risks old Smith's murderer ran, why Siley's not got a tenth part of the pluck for it, I tell you?"

"And why have you never told before?" asked Laurence.

"Ah! that's my business—quite my business, young man!" replied Tim, with a curious twinkle in his eye. "But I'm glad I didn't; I'm very glad I didn't. I can ruin Siley's pet scheme of underhand revenge nicely, and show Elsie that I haven't forgot her all these years and all the rough life I've led. And now I must have a rest. Much talking don't suit me now, and my late talk with Siley's tired me. He'll be surprised at one or two things he'll bear when I'm gone, and he thinks himself safe."

So saying, Tim turned his face from Laurence, and sunk into a sleep so quiet and still, that Laurence hardly knew whether he breathed or no, and at length bent over him to discover.

"Exhausted, I suppose," he said. "Poor fellow, if he means to make true his boast and confound this Jorrison's tricks, he must not delay."

Nor did he. At midday on the morrow, Laurence was hastily summoned to Tim's room, and found him not only with the doctors, but with a legal-looking person beside his bed.

"It's come to the last, sir," he said, quietly, "and I'm going to tell my tale before I go. You've all heard (looking round) of the murder of old Bill Smith, and know how difficult the police found it to get as much as a hint as to the whereabouts of the murderer, or who he was; and you know, too, perhaps, that of late they've been laying the blame at his wife's door, poor little thing! But she didn't do it; not she! She was too soft-hearted to turn even on a brute like him! No, no, it wasn't she who did for Bill Smith!"

"No! Who was it then?" asked the doctor.

"It was me—I, Timothy Blake!" replied he, calmly. "I shot him in his own grounds, and served him right, the brute!"

"You!" cried Laurence, aghast, and stepping back a pace from the bed whereon Tim lay, while the others held their peace.

"Ay, stranger; it was me as shot him, sure enough! And now I'll tell the tale; I shall cheat the hangman, though, for the night will see me a dead man. This is my dying declaration, take note, all of ye, and I want it legally taken down. I shouldn't like to think that after my death, any poor wretch, much less my old love, Elsie Seagur, should be accused of such a crime."

"When I was a boy, up in the State," he went on after a pause, "I worked on a ranch close to Elsie's father's, and made love to pretty Elsie Seagur, who never valued me at the price of a pound of butter. Silas Jorrison, who's been so carefully setting up the police after her,

courted her too, and with never a better chance with her than I had, but he flattered himself she cared for him; why, no one knows—'twas his vanity made him think so, I reckon; and when he came back to Omaha, first time, and found she'd married Bill Smith, he was real wild. He riled her, saying tart things about her marriage with a rich old man, and I fancy their friendship—his and Elsie's—didn't improve, but he struck up a kind of acquaintance with the old man, and made matters between him and Elsie more uncomfortable than ever; he always managed to set them by the ears somehow, and old Smith didn't spare his wife when he was roused.

"Well, I came down to this city some time after Silas did, and for my own reasons, which it don't signify explaining now, I called myself by an alias, and didn't visit much among my old friends. I heard of Elsie, though, and of the sort of life she led with old Smith; and somehow I longed to see her again, and speak a word or two to her, for I loved her and pitied her with all my heart, poor soul! but, as I said, I couldn't visit my old friends just then very well, and so I had to devise a way of meeting Elsie where I thought she might be found alone. It wasn't very difficult; they had a pretty place then outside the town, where they often went, and where Elsie would often be for hours alone in the gardens, so I laid in wait for her there one evening, when every one thought I'd left the city for good, and when, indeed, I was on the first stage of my return journey West, and then, sure enough, I did see Elsie.

"I heard voices—her voice and her husband's—and presently Elsie, all in tears, and Bill Smith in a towering rage, came out into the garden; it was growing dark, and they walked to and fro near the house; then I saw him strike her—the brute!—and she ran, crying bitterly, into the house. I'd a mind to run out and finish him then and there, but something held me back. He walked up and down, and then came toward where I was. Some unlucky movement I made caused him to stop, and look well into the bushes, and when he saw me, he bade me come out, with many oaths. I didn't linger, you may be sure, and gave him a few names in return for his abuse. Words led to blows, and worse. He was as blindly jealous of his wife as such a fellow would be; he accused me of being her lover, and drew a knife threatening to finish first me and then her. I had my revolver handy, and shot him as I would a dog, with the lie on his lips; and I'm not sorry I did it! No, not even now! That's the story, and here"—taking a revolver from under his pillow—"is the weapon I used; it'll fit the ball the police have, and which was found in Bill Smith's brain, you bet!"

Tim fell back faint and exhausted on his pillows as he finished; Laurence regarding him with a mixture of pity and horror, hard to describe, while the other bystanders took the matter with even more than professional coolness.

"At any rate," added Tim after a few minutes' silence, "Elsie's happy, it seems, now; and she wouldn't have been that if old Smith had lived, so for her sake I'm glad; and now I think I've spoiled Siley's little game in that quarter.

You'll tell her all about it when you go home, Mr. Gower, won't you?"

Laurence assured him it should be told at once.

"I don't think but what she'll believe I did it in her defense and because I loved her," went on Tim, his voice growing weaker and weaker. "I haven't had many people to care for, or any one to care for me in this world, but I loved her and have never forgotten her."

"And the other business," said the lawyer—"the money, you know?"

"The money? It's all in the United States Bank, Silas said," replied Tim, in a dreamy way.

"But you said you would—" began the lawyer again.

"You be easy; what's the money to me now? Let it go. Siley's got it—he's welcome. We were good friends once—let him keep it," muttered Tim.

"What! a mint o' money like that?" he returned, indignantly.

"Much or little, it don't matter to me now; it's like so much dirt to me. There's coin enough and to spare about to bury me."

The words came slowly, and a strange, far-away expression came into Tim's sunken eyes; he closed them, and for a while lay speechless; then he opened them, and looked at Laurence with a pleasant smile on his lips.

"She's very happy. Tell her Tim Blake never forgot her."

And so he died.

"A queer tale, but true enough, no doubt," said the lawyer, preparing to leave the room. "That sort of fellows lead wild, adventurous lives, and stick at nothing."

"He seemed to have more of the milk of human kindness left in him than most," said the doctor, turning from the bed; and then, addressing Laurence, "Where did you meet him, sir?"

"Over in Colorado," he replied. "I nursed him through a bad go of fever; but it was only just now that, like you, I learned who he really was."

"He's probably gone by twenty aliases," interposed the doctor. "Good-day, sir; I must be off."

And soon Laurence Gower was the only one left with the dead man; and a day or two later, when he was carried to his last resting-place, Laurence Gower was the only one who followed his remains to the grave.

"Heard the news?" said some one to him as he came into the hotel again. "What! no? I guess the city's in an uproar to-day. Hope you're not a sufferer; the United States Bank's gone smash!"

"The United States?" cried Laurence.

"Ay; news, isn't it? But are you a sufferer, sir?"

"Not I," replied Laurence; "but I know some who are."

For Laurence remembered what Tim Blake had said, that in the United States Bank Silas Jorrison had placed not only all his own savings, but the money he had so ruthlessly robbed his dead mate of.

"So he's punished in perhaps the only way

he could really feel punishment," thought Laurence, as he walked thoughtfully away; "he's lost his money, and he's balked in his revenge! Poor Tim, he had a grain or two of good in him in spite of all, and I'm sorry for him; but as for Silas Jorrison, he's the greater villain of the two by a long chalk, and I'm glad he's been served out."

Great was the excitement prevailing in Omaha among those who took an interest in the matter when it became known that the murderer of Mr. Smith had confessed, and that the poor lady on whom the suspicion of guilt had fallen was blameless.

"She'll have been in a sad state of anxiety," said Mr. Herries, the lawyer, to Laurence. "If you know her, sir, I'd telegraph it's all right."

"Just what I was about to do," replied Laurence.

And off he walked to the telegraph-office, and then to the railroad ticket-office, where he secured a through ticket to New York on the first eastern bound express.

"I wonder if Penelope will forgive me?" he thought, as he left it.

CHAPTER XII.

"THE BITTER PASSED, MORE WELCOME IS THE SWEET."

THE telegram sped on its way, and as we have seen, arrived duly at its destination; for Laurence's telegram it was, and not the much-dreaded one from Ivor's friends in town, that reached Crest Lawn the morning he returned from New York, and the sight of which caused Elsie to swoon with terror.

Ivor tore it open, dreading to read its contents, and when his eyes fell on the words it contained, he could scarcely comprehend them.

"Read, Pen!—read!" he gasped. "A telegram from Gower! The real murderer has confessed! Elsie is safe—safe—and her innocence proclaimed! Pen, read it! I can hardly understand it, my brain seems going!"

Eagerly Penelope took the telegram from him. Laurence Gower, what did he know of the matter? How was he mixed up in it? Even at this trying moment her heart beat at the sound of his name; and here he was, telegraphing to Ivor the news of the discovery of the real murderer!

She had not long to indulge in meditation, for hardly had she read the concluding words—"Shall be with you in five days"—than Elsie began to revive.

"Take courage, darling!" whispered Ivor to her, as she clung trembling to him. "I have good news for you!"

"What? they are not coming to take me yet?" she asked, with a hunted look in her beautiful violet eyes.

"They are not coming at all, my love. You need fear nothing now; you are safe," he replied.

"Safe?" she cried, looking up almost incredulously in his face.

"Yes, safe. The true murderer has been discovered—has confessed," said Ivor.

And Elsie, leaning her head on his shoulder, burst into tears—tears of joy, relief, and gratitude.

"And who tells you this?" she asked. "What! Laurence Gower? Ab, he has not forgotten us, after all! Pen, you see he will be here soon, darling!"

But Pen had vanished. She could not restrain her tears, and had fled to her own room.

How could she meet Laurence Gower again after the cruel letter he had written her? She loved him still, deeply and truly; but could she trust her happiness to a man whose jealousy it was so easy to arouse, and who, under the influence of that jealousy did not hesitate to follow any path the promptings of his angry heart suggested? Would it not be better not to see him at all, or, if they must meet, meet but as the merest acquaintances?

She consulted Elsie on this point, who was eager that the past should be forgotten.

"It is not that I am vindictive that I cannot forgive him, Elsie," replied Pen, earnestly; "it is to the future I look. If he should treat me in the same style when I am—or, rather, if I should ever become—his wife, it would break my heart, or—or I should grow to hate and despise him."

"But, of course, when you are once his wife, he will never dream of doubting you!" cried Elsie, indignantly.

But Pen shook her head sadly.

"I don't see that that should follow, Elsie, and if it did not, I should be miserable."

Elsie turned away saddened and troubled. She had set her heart on the marriage between Pen and her old love taking place, and it was with some surprise that she found Ivor sympathizing in Penelope's view of the matter, and advising that she should at any rate think well over the business, and, if need be, put Laurence through a time of probation.

Five days later Laurence arrived, and was a long time closeted with Elsie and Ivor before Penelope made her appearance.

She would dearly, in her heart of hearts, have liked to have been with them, and hear him tell his story; but she was aware that for the present her self-control was not equal to the task of meeting Laurence with perfect calmness.

She would either show too plainly her joy at seeing him, or else treat him with a coldness that would make him believe the old offense was not forgiven; and she wished, if possible, to be friendly and pleasant to the young man, nothing more or less.

When she did meet him nothing could have been more unconcerned than her manner; and Elsie, whose eyes were still wet with the tears Laurence's account of Tim Blake's confession and death had brought to them, looked at her with astonishment.

Had she really got over her liking for Laurence, then, that she could meet him with such indifference?

It was in vain that the next day, and the next, and for several days after, Laurence endeavored to gain an interview with Penelope.

The girl avoided him, saw through all his little ruses to effect a *tete-a-tete*, all his schemes to meet her in solitary parts of the garden and grounds, and always managed gracefully and pleasantly enough to get out of the drives or rides Elsie slyly planned to leave them for a

time together, so that Laurence might have a chance of making his peace with her.

"No," she thought; "I will not make myself too cheap. I will not let him think that he has only to hold up his finger to me, or whistle, and I shall be at his beck and call. I shall wait awhile, and he must be content to wait, too."

And so it came to pass that a fortnight, three weeks, a month rolled slowly on, and Laurence Gower found it was incumbent on him to leave Westham without having gained an inch of ground in Penelope's good graces.

He looked very worn and unhappy as he sorrowfully bade them good-by.

"We shall meet again in town soon," said Elsie, who pitied him sincerely, and could not understand why Pen continued to be so cold to him. "You must often come and see us, you know."

"I—I will, with pleasure," he replied; "that is—if—if my company is not disagreeable to Miss West."

"To me!" replied Penelope, who had been standing a little apart with her eyes cast down, and feeling very sad, but now speaking in her usual careless tone. "Pray do not think so! I should be ungrateful indeed if I did not remember the service you have rendered Elsie; besides, if my company is not hateful to you, as I imagined (not without reason) it might be—Dear me, Elsie, what is the matter? Am I dreadfully rude and matter-of-fact? Please excuse me, Mr. Gower, and don't give me a thought when you come to Crest Lawn, if you find thinking of me disagreeable to you!"

"Thinking of you disagreeable! Why, you are never out of my thoughts, Penelope!" he cried. "And if I am not too late—"

"Which you certainly will be for the train, if you don't start," retorted Penelope. "I declare it's nearly four o'clock! Good-by, Mr. Gower, till we meet in town!"

And off she ran, while Laurence, hardly knowing what to think—whether to hope or despair—was driven off to the station.

The season had just begun in the city, and seemed likely to be a gay one.

Ivor and Elsie, though they loved each other more than ever, had (as Mrs. Carter prophesied they would) thought it well to behave like other folk in their station of life, and repair to town for a few months, especially as poor, dear Penelope must necessarily (though she would not allow it) be terribly tired of the country.

"I will try him a little bit more," thought Pen, as she returned from a ball where she had been the gayest of the gay and the center of admiration, and where poor Laurence had stood in a corner and watched her with a sickening sensation of despair at his heart; "and then, if he chooses, we will make it up. It's weak of me, I suppose; but I really don't believe I can get on happily without him."

But the next day Laurence did not come to the house, neither did Elsie and Penelope meet him at any of the parties they went to, and Penelope began to look sad and depressed, and to say in her own heart that she had been too hard and unforgiving. Perhaps he would come back to them no more!

He came, though, a week later, and finding

only Elsie in the drawing-room, opened his heart to her, and begged her to induce her cousin to grant him a few moments' conversation alone; after which, he would never trouble her with his presence again if she desired that so it should be.

A few moments afterward Pen entered, and at once he saw how ill and sad she looked.

"I have come," he said, holding out his hand to her, "to ask your forgiveness for a foolish, cruel, jealous letter I wrote you, and still more for my subsequent conduct. Can you ever forgive and forget it, Penelope? You can't?" he went on, as she made no answer. "Then I'll say good-by, and be done with it."

"But—but," faltered Pen, looking up into his face with the old mischievous twinkle in her beautiful gray eyes, "don't be in a hurry again. I never said I couldn't or wouldn't!"

"Pen," he cried, seizing her hand, "do you mean—"

"I mean, I think it was a very good thing you went away, or what would have happened to poor, dear Elsie?" she replied, shyly.

"But you forgive me—tell me? Oh, Pen, you have punished me enough, surely?" he cried.

"Well, perhaps I have; but, oh, Laurence, you must never doubt me again; if you do, it will kill me!" she murmured, as he pressed her to his heart in joy too deep for words.

"Never!" he said, at length—"never!"

"I think he is quite cured of his jealousy," said Elsie, a few months after, when Pen and Laurence had returned from their wedding tour.

And she was right.

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